

*Loving*  
to tell the  
*Story*

How to Enjoy Sharing  
with Others What  
Jesus Christ Means in  
Your Life

Harry C. Griffith

# **Loving to Tell the Story**

**How to Enjoy Sharing with Others  
What Jesus Christ Means in Your Life**

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Loving to Tell the Story

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This book is dedicated to J. Keith Miller who motivated so many of us to tell the story.

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## Introduction

If Jesus is more important to us than anybody or anything, we should enjoy talking about him and what he means to us in our day-to-day lives. We should love to tell that story. The purpose of this book is to enable us to tell that story in both a bold and an effective way.

Perhaps it is presumptuous to say this book is the only witnessing guide we will ever need. But, let's look at what it contains.

It begins with the assumption that its readers are Christians serious enough about our faith to want to be able to talk about what Christ means in our lives. Toward that end, we are challenged to find the ways to do this that will work best for us.

Over the course of this book we will look at what witnessing is (and isn't). We will discover or re-discover our biographical witness (the "whole story" of our relationship with God) but also realize that we will have many more opportunities to share our situational witness (the ways in which God is working in our lives on a day to day basis that parallel where our friend is needing help).

We will consider biblical models for witnessing and the fact that there are, in a sense, only seven people to whom we witness. We will look at many ways of witnessing that have worked for other Christians and other factors to consider that will help us be more effective in our witnessing.

Joyce Neville, author of *How to Share Your Faith without Being Offensive*, has graciously provided two chapters from her

book: one containing 39 examples of things to witness about and the other suggesting 21 guidelines for witnessing.

To equip us as thoroughly as possible, we will also consider the five biggest objections that people have about Christianity. There is also a chapter on how to find out where people are in their spiritual lives so that we may know how best to reach them with Christ's love.

In case we have an opportunity to take the "next step" with our friend—the step beyond witnessing that leads to a commitment or re-commitment of their life to the Lord—our friend Jay Fowler has provided us with his unique and inspired way of doing so. To support that effort we also have a chapter containing famous quotations and poems to use in reaching people at their special point of need.

The Appendix contains a study guide so that the book can be used for group or personal study. Howard Ball of Church-LIFE has allowed us to use a personal testimony worksheet and a personal testimony checklist that should be helpful, and Renee Miller's list of attitudes and responses often encountered in sharing the faith and a sample witness should also be useful.

These are the reasons I believe this is the only witnessing guide you will ever need. May God bless you in sharing your faith with others.

*Harry C. Griffith*  
*Hickory Flat, Georgia*

# One

## Accepting the Challenge

“One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see” (John 9:25b). That was not only the witness of the man blind from birth whom Jesus healed; it is the witness of all of us who have truly accepted Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of our lives.

“You will be my witnesses,” Jesus told his followers (Acts 1:8), and that message is just as much for Christians today as it was for those to whom he spoke it. We may not be evangelists, but all Christians are witnesses. An evangelist is someone especially called by God to share the Christian faith with others; that is his or her primary ministry. The rest of us have a great variety of other gifts and ministries (see, for example, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4), but we are all called to witness.

We use a variety of terms to refer to what we call witnessing. Our witness is our testimony and it is the telling of our story...the story of our relationship with Christ. When Rosalind Rinker and I wrote the book *Sharing God's Love* years ago it was about witnessing. Sharing God's love is what we do when we give our testimony.

As we begin this venture together, it is important that we understand that our focus is on witnessing (testimony, telling our story, sharing our faith) rather than presenting the gospel (calling for a decision, leading a person to Christ). What we do by way of witnessing will be a step toward a person making the decision for Christ and we will look at a method of doing that later



in this book. But, our primary focus is on simply giving our witness. The reasons for this approach are manifold.

When I discussed the plan for this book with one of my closest confidants, he had a negative reaction. “Why would you think you can write a book that would be the only witnessing guide anyone would need when in fact the best things available are Campus Crusade’s ‘Four Spiritual Laws’ booklet and Jim Kennedy’s ‘Evangelism Explosion’?” That fairly well lays on the line the difference between what we will be doing together in this book and the concept that many have about witnessing. The “Four Spiritual Laws” booklet is a gem for leading people through a gospel presentation and toward a commitment to Christ, and is one I have used for that purpose. “Evangelism Explosion” is an effective congregational approach for teaching people how to call on others and make a gospel presentation toward their accepting Christ.

In my opinion, however, to be effective in using the “Four Spiritual Laws” booklet, we need to have developed a relationship with the person to whom we are making the presentation of it. This book is about how to develop that kind of relationship through witnessing to the individual. “Evangelism Explosion” is for those congregations looking for an evangelism program; this book is for all Christians to aid us in making Christ a part of our everyday encounters with others.

Let’s look at the issue another way. A friend, who is a renowned evangelist in the Billy Graham style, was talking with several of us one day about the person who led him to the Lord. He said that, when he got to heaven, he would be able to thank that person for changing his life. He noted, however, that there would probably be a long line waiting to see the man because he had led so many to Christ. The reaction on the part of the rest of us was that we didn’t have one person we would want to see for that purpose but many, because it had taken many people’s witness to lead us to Christ.

The point is that we can thank God for people who are truly gifted by God as evangelists and the vital ministry they perform in confronting people with the claims of Christ and praying with them to receive Jesus as the Lord and Savior of their lives. I hope that many such people will find this book helpful. However, here we are trying to reach a broader segment of Christendom: everyone who realizes that, whether or not we have been gifted with the heart of an evangelist, we know we should be able to talk with others about what Christ means in our lives. The vast majority of people are not brought to Christ by someone who confronts them with the gospel, but by being brought to church by someone who has witnessed to them and built a relationship with them that opens their hearts to God.

It is also important to note that witnessing of the type we will be dealing with in this book is not only for the benefit of our non-Christian friend or neighbor. It is also for our fellow Christians who are strengthened by our witness to them. When we testify to another Christian about something God has done in our life, we re-enforce that person's faith and help them grow in their relationship with Christ; we encourage them by sharing something God has shown us that speaks to them at their point of need; and our witnessing emboldens them to become more effective witnesses for the Lord.

Some of us nonetheless feel awkward about giving our witness. We aren't confident that we know how. We are reluctant to deal with something as personal as our faith with someone who might reject us. We don't know how to "break the ice" in bringing our faith into a conversation. We are overwhelmed by the plurality of the world around us...so many people with so many different ideas about God and about how we are to live.

What we will do together in the chapters that follow is to look at witnessing in all its aspects. If we happen to be an evangelist because that is the spiritual gift God has given us, we will be highly motivated to tell our story and will do so at every opportunity. If we're not an evangelist, but a sincere Christian, we

nonetheless have a vital role in God's plans. And there is no need to get uptight about sharing our testimony with others. God is not putting pressure on us to do it. He wants us to look at it as a creative challenge rather than an obligation...or worse, a burden.

In the pages that follow we will come to understand more fully the story we have to tell and how we can do it in a natural and joyful way. If we are shy and introverted and get our words tangled up when we are trying to talk about the things that are most important in life, we will find examples of how to overcome these obstacles and ways of telling our story that will be easiest for us. The purpose of this book is to show us how to witness, and to give us an abundance of ideas and resources for doing it effectively. We are on the verge of moving out into a great and exciting adventure for God.

Bill Bright was one of the greatest Christians of our day. He said this: "None of us has a long time here on planet Earth. It's kind of a staging ground. It's our split second in eternity when we have an opportunity to invest our lives, our time, our talent and our treasure to help fulfill what our Lord came into this world to do and commissioned us to do. In fact, his last words before he ascended to be with the Father were: 'Be my witnesses.'"

This should be the only witnessing guide you will ever need. May God bless you in sharing your faith in Christ with others.

## Two

### Finding Our Story

In her book *How to Share Your Faith without Being Offensive*, Joyce Neville begins with the definition of “witness”. She says, “Webster’s Dictionary defines the word *witness* as that which serves as evidence, or furnishes evidence or proof; one who beholds, or otherwise has personal knowledge of, anything; to bear testimony; to give evidence; to observe with one’s own eyes or ears.”

She goes on to say, “A Christian witness is a story of God’s action in one’s personal life or a description of what being a Christian means in a personal way. When a person shares verbally with another person something about his ongoing interaction with God in Christ, relating some way in which God’s power has been manifested in his life or God’s nature has been revealed to him, he is giving a Christian witness.” We are witnessing when we talk about anything Christ has done in our lives. When we do so, we do not have to preach or teach. We don’t have to quote Scripture; and, to the person with whom we are talking who is not a Christian, citing a Bible verse can have a negative effect. Like the blind man in John 9, we are just saying, “This is what happened to me.”

Quoting Joyce Neville again, “There are two ways you can witness. One is the biographical witness in which you relate the story of your spiritual life. The other is the single-story witness in which you relate one experience you have had in which God had a definite part or did a particular thing. The biographical witness will be the narrative either of how you came into

your faith in the first place, how this experience changed your life, and the results since, or of how you have grown in the faith all your life and what your spiritual milestones have been. Usually, the opportunities God gives you to share your faith with another will call for the single-story type of witness—a particular experience in your life that meets a particular need in another’s life or is on a subject of interest to another.” However, it is important for us to think through our “biographical witness,” not only because of the reassurance it can give us concerning our relationship with Christ but also because the times will come when we have the opportunity to tell our whole story.

See if you can find yourself within the illustration that follows. In his commentary on Revelation 21:13, William Barclay made an inspired observation. He stated clearly that he was not interpreting the verse but just speculating on a way of looking at it. This particular verse of Scripture is where John describes the twelve gates to the New Jerusalem, three in each of the four walls surrounding the city.

Barclay saw each of the walls as representing a way in which a person comes to Christ. I’m going to take some liberty with Barclay’s idea to illustrate the variety of ways in which God has come into our individual lives, and thus the particular story we have to tell concerning our relationship with him.

Barclay says that the east gates represent the rising of the sun, the beginning of the day. People who enter by these gates are ones who came into a relationship with Christ early in life. I would add that they might have entered by one of the following three ways. (1) They were from a loving Christian family, were taken to church from an early age, believed what they heard and have followed Christ ever since. (2) Something dramatic happened while they were in their childhood that caused them to turn to Christ and they have maintained that relationship over subsequent years. (3) A person they greatly admired while in their youth told them about Christ and they accepted him as their Lord and Savior.

According to William Barclay, the gates on the north represent the cold land, harsh and challenging, and those who have come by this route have either done so intellectually or have had a painful or difficult path. I would expand this idea a little to see three ways these “northern gate” people may have come to the Lord. (1) This would be the person who came to Christ intellectually; one who has reasoned that Christ is the answer for his or her life and has not wavered from that belief. (2) Then there would be the person who was brought to the reality of Jesus’ love because of a tragedy that occurred to himself or someone he loved. (3) Another who might come by the “northern gate” is one who became conscious of his sinfulness, addiction or other failure that could only be healed by the grace of God in Christ.

Barclay’s “southern gates” represent warmth and gentleness, those who have been loved into a relationship with Christ. I would divide them into three categories once again. (1) This is the person who saw in other Christians something they didn’t have, a joy or peace that could only be explained by their faith, they were invited to church or to accept Christ, they did and have never regretted it. (2) This would be the person who “married into the faith” in the sense that their spouse became a model to them of Christian love that led to their personal commitment. (3) Then there is the person who has had a good life and has, in the process, become grateful to God for the way he has provided for him, ultimately leading to showing that gratitude by becoming a Christian.

The final gates, the western ones, represent, for Barclay, the dying day, the setting sun, the evening of our lives. So, again, we have three ways of entering. (1) This is the person who, through the passing of the years, has finally come to the realization that what the world has to offer is just not enough, there must be something more and it is Christ. (2) Then there is the one who simply took a long time to get around to it, perhaps pursuing other religions or philosophies that met some of his life’s needs but not enough; somehow the message of God’s

love had never penetrated to either the heart or the brain until something happened that woke him up and led him to a decision for Christ. (3) Finally, we have the person who, because of age and perhaps increasing infirmities, becomes fearful of death and realizes that it is not too late to give his life to the Lord.

It is highly likely that most of us can identify with one of these “gates” to Christ. If we can, that is our story, our witness, our testimony. Some of us will find that we fit into more than one of these categories; there may have been a combination of two or more that led us to Christ. Then there are those of us who originally fit into one of these situations but subsequently went through a period of doubt and falling away from Christ only to be led back to him in a different manner from our initial experience. Still others may have a story that is very different from any of these. That is the wonderful thing about the Christian faith: there are a great many ways in which God reaches us. Together, as the body of Christ, we have a rich harvest of faith to share with others.

Take some time now to think through which of these situations best represents your witness. After you have, tell it to someone you love who will be supportive of you in listening to it. Better still, either before or after doing that, write it down.

## Three

### Telling Our Story

Before going further, here are some points to remember...ten characteristics of witnessing.

#### **1. We are called to be witnesses to our Lord.**

The New Testament literally shouts the words, “You are my witnesses.” (See, for example, Matthew 4:19, 10:32, 28:18-20; Mark 5:19, 16:15; Luke 24:45-48; Acts 1:8, 6:7, 8:4; Romans 10:9-15; and 2 Peter 3:15). As stated earlier, we may not be called to be evangelists in the sense of confronting others with the claims of Christ but — by the very identification of ourselves with the Christian faith — we are all witnesses, either good ones or bad. That is simply because, if people know we are Christians, they will view us as ones who look and act as Christians look and act. We should want, with all our hearts, to be good witnesses; otherwise, we betray the very Lord whom we say we honor.

If all Christians would simply tell their stories—their whole stories or specific instances of the love of Christ in their lives—when they have opportunities to do so, God would honor that obedience to Scripture and we would be much more effective in bringing the world to Christ. Few people come into a relationship with the Lord because of the action of one person alone, but each person is important in the total process of an individual’s coming to Christ. It is a process of sowing seeds of God’s love of which telling our story is a vital part.



## **2. We each have a story to tell.**

Our story is the story of our relationship with God. Our lives will be enriched as we reconstruct the events of the Lord's advent into our lives and what has happened as a result. Our lives will be even more enriched as we share that story with others.

## **3. Some of us are, nevertheless, reluctant to tell our story.**

We respect the privacy of the other person; we don't want to interfere, to force ourselves on others. Perhaps it's because we do not love enough. If we did, we would know that God has no greater gift for the other than himself, and we may be the lifeline through which that gift is given.

I had my own awakening concerning the matter of reluctance to tell my story some years ago. In prayer, I believe God gave me the following message about our responsibility to tell our story to others.

### HE WILL NOT KNOW

I could give him reasons why I am a Christian,  
But he could give me arguments against those reasons.  
I could tell him of spiritual experiences I have had,  
But he could say they were my emotions.  
I could tell him of physical healings I have had,  
But he could say they were psychosomatic.  
I could tell him of miracles I have seen,  
But he could say they were my imagination.  
I could tell him how, over and over again, things have worked  
out just right while I was following the Lord's leading,  
But he could say they were coincidences.  
I could tell him how relationships have been brought to  
wholeness,  
But he could say that a psychological counselor could have  
accomplished the same thing.  
I could tell him how lives have been changed,  
But he could say they were simply attitude adjustments.  
I could show him love,

But he could reject it.  
If God has not gone before me,  
To prepare his heart,  
Nothing I could say  
Would be of much value.

But if God has prepared his heart and opened his eyes and ears  
And I do not tell him why I am a Christian,  
He will not know.  
If I do not tell him of my experiences, my healings, and the miracles I have seen,  
He will not know.  
If I do not share with him the ways in which Christ works in my life and has worked in the lives of others,  
He will not know.  
If I do not show him love,  
**HE WILL NOT KNOW.**

#### **4. We are to tell our story in a natural way.**

There is no prescribed formula for telling our story. It is not a matter of covering steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 in precise order; and, if we don't get it just right, we will have failed God and the person with whom we shared our story. No, it is simply a matter of relaxing and letting the Holy Spirit lead us. If we are truly willing to be used by God in telling our story, he will guide our words and redeem our mistakes.

#### **5. It gets easier the more we do it.**

As with anything else, the more we tell our story, the easier it is to do it. The old "practice makes perfect" rule comes into play. However, we should not try to become polished and professional in telling our story; we must be open to guidance from the Holy Spirit and be natural.

#### **6. We tell our own story.**

As someone has said, "God has no grandchildren." We do not have a relationship with God because we inherited it from our parents. We each have our own relationship with God that we

have come into and in which we live in a unique way. Unless we tell our own story, people will know we are phony.

**7. We become increasingly conscious of opportunities to tell our story the more we are willing to be used by God.**

As we see that it is not so difficult to tell our story, and others are blessed by it, we become more aware of opportunities to do so.

**8. If God is active in our lives, the telling of our story will help others.**

People with whom we come into contact want to know that God is alive and well and cares for them. If we are living in a vital relationship with God, our story is one of the most precious gifts of love we can offer to others. As people see God's love flow through us, in telling about the reality of Jesus in our lives, they sense that such a relationship may be possible for them as well.

**9. We will seldom have an opportunity to tell our whole story.**

It is much more likely that we will only have a chance to tell bits and pieces of our story, what we might call our situational story, things that God has done in our lives that parallel where the other presently is. The important thing to note here is, we shouldn't become frustrated because of the lack of time or opportunity to tell our whole story. We should simply rejoice that God can use parts of it to reach others.

**10. There are four elements of the "classic definition" of telling our story.**

Theoretically, our story consists of: (1) what my life was like before I came into a relationship with the Lord, (2) how I came into that relationship, (3) how my life changed as a result and (4) how it is changing day by day. *However*, it should be noted that not everyone's story falls into the "classic definition." Whereas some people are "knocked off a horse" by God in the manner of St. Paul, others have come into the relationship in a much more subtle way. As we noted in the last chapter of the book, some

people have been conscious of an active relationship with God as far back as they can remember. *That's okay.* Our story is our story, whether it fits a mold or not; and God will use it if we'll give him a chance by telling it to others.

Another extremely important matter is this: even though we have pointed out that not all stories would fall into the “classic definition,” we should all be able to identify with step (4), how our life is changing day by day. If God is not a vital part of our life right now (even if we are going through a spiritually dry time but constantly seeking God nonetheless), then we really don't have much of a story to tell that will help the other person.

The purpose of stressing the necessity of a current relationship with God is three-fold: (1) our relationship with God is either day by day, or it is nothing at all, (2) as we are increasingly conscious of his operation in our lives, we are increasingly conscious of the good news we have to share, and (3) most of our opportunities for telling our story have to do with day by day incidents that speak to the needs of the other person.

If we are sensitive listeners—as we will be encouraged to be many times in this book—we will be able to pinpoint where the other person is in his or her faith journey. And, if God is active in our lives, we will be able to share those parts of our story (what God recently did in our life) that relate directly to the situation facing the person with whom we would share.

As our friend struggles with depression, injured relationships, or problems with the children or the car, we may have wisdom to share and comfort to give based upon what God has done for us concerning similar struggles. We don't “lay” God's goodness to us on the other person; but, drawing from what we have learned from God in similar situations, we gently share possibilities, glimmers of hope. God does care and will help!

There is no difference for the Christian between the sacred and the secular. God is a part of it all. Most people with whom we are in contact don't know that, however.

One of the ways in which we can be God's loving people is to raise conversations to a spiritual level. Again, however, we do it gently, subtly, rather than "laying something on" the other person. In other words, when someone is discussing a problem, we don't say, "Now, now, you must have faith!"

In a sense every conversation is an opportunity for what I call "conversation shifting." We simply listen, prayerfully seeking God's guidance in how to move the conversation from an inane, worldly plane to a godly one because we believe that everything that is worth saying or doing is important to God and he would like to have a hand in it.

If someone is concerned about her own or someone else's health, we can honestly say, "I'll certainly have that in my prayers." (If it would be comfortable to do so, we might even say, "Let's pray about that right now.")

If the other person is rattling off a series of wonderful things that have happened in her life, we can say, "I wonder what that says to us about God and his providence?"

If our friend is struggling with a decision we can ask, "Have you sought guidance from God on the matter?"

Sometimes I have not been able to change the nature of a discussion because I couldn't find a natural way to bring the spiritual dimension into it, so I have parted with, "God bless you." Occasionally the other person, upon hearing the words, has paused and launched back into the conversation on an entirely new, higher, plane.

Deep down within them most people want to believe in God. They want to know that he is active in the world today and wants to help them. But, that may not be the way life seems to

be going; so, the other person will probably not bring God into the conversation. Once we do, opportunities to deal with a “situational story” or even our “whole story” abound.

God would love others through us. If we are willing, God will give us opportunities to tell the story of our relationship with him. When we do, we will not only bless the other person but will be greatly blessed ourselves.



## Four

### Who Is Your Biblical Model?

In their book *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg illustrate how different people—by their very nature—have different approaches to witnessing. The authors used Bible people to make their point. As we think about ourselves and our inclinations or reluctance to witness in a particular way, it should be helpful to look at some of the Bible characters and what they did. Maybe we can identify with one of them in a special way that will shape how we approach telling our story.

**Peter**, for instance, was very confrontational in his approach. By nature, that was the kind of guy Peter was. He wasn't shy or one to hold things in. He let you know where he stood. Peter would be quick to tell you who Jesus is and why you should give your life to him.

Peter was like our friend Bill whose witness is set forth in the appendix to this book. About Bill it is said that there is a “three foot rule”; that is, if you get within three feet of Bill, he is going to tell you about Jesus.

The person who most illustrated the confrontational approach in my life was Helen Shoemaker. Helen was the wife of Dr. Sam Shoemaker, one of the great evangelists of his day. Sam was instrumental in founding Faith at Work, the Pittsburgh Experiment and many other ministries that are still effective today. But Helen was quite a person in her own right! She never



passed up an opportunity to confront people about their relationship with Jesus Christ.

My wife Emily and I went to meet with Helen to discuss my doing an anthology of her husband's writings. While I was pouring over Dr. Sam's manuscripts, Helen focused on Emily. "Honey," she said, "you remind me of someone who is sitting around the train station watching the trains come and go. When are you going to do something; when are you going to give your life to Jesus?" Although Emily was already a devoted Christian, Helen's confrontation of her helped her take an important next step in her journey of faith.

**Paul** took a more intellectual approach to witnessing than Peter. Paul was a highly educated man. Furthermore, Jesus had revealed many things to him through prayer and other mystical experiences over a period of years that allowed him to become the greatest of all Christian theologians.

Paul would reason with those with whom he came into contact. He would analyze what approach would work best with them and use it. With Paul, his mind was always working and he had it attuned to God's will for him and for those to whom he might witness.

Our friend Larry would be a good illustration of the Paul approach. Larry loves the Lord just as much as anyone else, and he has had some profound mystical experiences of Christ. But when he talks with another person about Jesus, it is in a very reasoned, methodical way. Jesus is clearly the way to the Father for Larry, and he can make a very convincing case for those willing to listen.

**The Blind Man** represents the impassioned approach. In John 9, we have the whole story, but our focus is on verse 25. In response to the intensive interrogation of the Pharisees about how he had been healed of blindness from birth, he simply told them, "I was blind but now I see!" He wasn't a confrontational char-

acter like Peter or a knowledgeable one like Paul, he just knew that a miracle had happened in his life and he wasn't about to minimize it. This was good news, and we can be sure he shared it with enthusiasm the remainder of his life.

Our friend Frank was a great example of this approach; and, in fact, there are a couple of illustrations from his life later in the book. Frank was 60 years old and served as an officer in his church, but had never had a personal encounter with Jesus. When the church agreed to have a renewal weekend at which people would have an opportunity to witness to Christ in their lives, Frank attended just to make sure things didn't get out of hand. He was wary of anything emotional happening in *his* church.

Guess who got “renewed” that weekend? Finding his “spiritual sight” at that late stage in his life was just as miraculous to Frank as the blind man receiving his physical sight. Frank spent the remainder of his life being one of the most effective witnesses I have ever known.

**Andrew** engaged in what many call “secondary evangelism.” (Incidentally, Hybels and Mittelberg used Matthew to illustrate this approach, but I felt that Andrew filled the role just as well and I have always had a fondness for Andrew. Think about it. He was Peter's brother, the one who brought Peter to Jesus, and yet he did not become “one of the three”—Jesus' closest companions—as Peter, James and John did). From what we know of Andrew in the Bible, he was not one to witness directly to others. Instead, his focus was on bringing people to where they could meet Jesus. In addition to bringing Peter to Jesus (John 1:40), it was Andrew who brought the inquiring Greeks to Jesus in John 12:20-22. Andrew himself was not an evangelist; he brought others to the place where they could be reached directly by Jesus.

My wife Emily and I are probably examples of the Andrew approach. We have both taught about witnessing over the

years, have given our witnesses many times, and I have had the opportunity to do quite a bit of writing on the subject. But by far most of our time has been spent in preparing others to witness and bringing them into situations where they can meet Jesus. We see ourselves as “secondary evangelists” like Andrew.

We are presently in a relatively newly formed and growing church, and this book was prepared to help the members of that congregation witness more effectively. We have also been discovering new ways to bring non-churched members of the community together in order to get to know them and where they are in their spiritual lives. The ultimate purpose, of course, is to help them find the church home that will be best for them.

**The Samaritan Woman** is an example of the old saying that evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Her story is in John 4. Jesus did the “unthinkable” in talking with a Samaritan woman in a culture in which men did not strike up conversations with women in the first place, but certainly not a Jew speaking to a religiously tainted Samaritan. Yet, because of what Jesus told her about himself, she found relief from her sin-ridden life and went to tell others what had happened to her.

Mary was a woman in our former church who exemplified the Samaritan woman, not because she was a social outcast who found acceptance, but because she was one who was ministered to unto wholeness. She had faced divorce, emotional problems, financial difficulties, and many other obstacles. She had felt rejection every direction she turned until she turned to Christ. Jesus, in the form of his church, accepted her and ministered to her needs. She was truly the “beggar who found bread.”

Interestingly, Mary became our most effective witness. As she encountered others facing the same challenges in life that had nearly defeated her, she told them where they could get help. When these others found help in the church for their spiritual, emotional and physical needs, they not only became Chris-

tians but they became disciples. They became ones who told others “where to find bread.”

**The Good Samaritan** wasn’t really a person but a character in a parable Jesus used to illustrate servanthood in Luke 10:25-32. Here we have the final biblical example I will use of the variety of approaches we can take toward witnessing. This was a man who unselfishly met the great need of another with no thought of reward.

Our daughter and son-in-law are excellent examples of this type of witnessing. Each simply has the heart of a servant. Bill and Evelyn are also a team in their ministry. They see a need and get busy trying to fill it. Whether it is teaching young people about Christ through Teen CBS (Community Bible Study) or Student Venture, or letting kids who are in trouble stay with them until difficulties can be worked out, they are available for whatever the need may be. They witness in deed as well as in word. And, it is important to note that unless the way we live (our deeds) matches the words we say (our verbal witness) we will not be effective in our ministry.

These are just a few examples from the Bible that can serve as models for us in how to witness. It is likely that we can find ourselves in one or more of these biblical characters. They can become examples to us of what our best approach to witnessing might be.



## **Five**

### **Finding What Works for You**

We have now had an opportunity to accept the challenge of witnessing to Christ in our lives, to consider what a witness is and isn't, to think about our "biographical" witness (our "whole story"), to review some characteristics of telling our story, and to compare ourselves with some biblical models. Now let's look at various approaches to witnessing to find some that would work for us. These are ways other Christians have found helpful in witnessing to their faith in Christ. We should find among them some ideas that will be helpful to us.

#### **Reaching Your Neighbors**

Using Luke 10:5-9 as his basis, here are Ed Silvoso's steps to reaching your neighbors for Christ:

1. Bless those who live in your neighborhood. Pray for them, especially praying for those who are not active Christians. Pray God's blessing on them regularly (Luke 10:5).
2. Establish a relationship with your neighbors so that, when they need you, they will call on you for help and prayer (Luke 10:7).
3. Be the instrument through whom God works a miracle in the life of your neighborhood. As your neighbors come to understand what Jesus means in your life, and know that you will pray for them and that they can come to you with their needs and problems, they will see God work

through you in their lives. When the miracle happens, they will know that it was because of your prayers (Luke 10:9a).

4. Tell them about Jesus (“preach the gospel”). Now that their lives are open to Jesus because of the miracle that God has worked in their lives, it is time to tell them how they can become a part of the kingdom of God; or, simply invite and take them to church (Luke 10:9b).

## **Jesus’ Example**

A classic model of how to witness was given to us by Christ himself in John 4:1-45. Here is how you can adapt Jesus’ technique to your own:

1. Engage in conversation. That is what Jesus did. He spoke to a Samaritan woman who was a stranger to him, an unheard of thing for a Jewish man to do in Jesus’ time. If you want to share the Good News, you must start with communication just as Jesus did. Be open to God’s leading with a willing heart (Acts 8:4-8, 26-28).
2. Entice personal interest. Jesus got the woman’s full attention by making provocative statements (vv. 10, 13). You don’t need special training to talk about what Jesus means in your life. Be natural, but be interesting as well (John 9:25).
3. Enliven through compassion, concern. Jesus cared about the woman at the well; he spent time with her although she was a person of loose morals. To be effective, all you need is to let God’s love flow through you to the other person (1 Corinthians 13:4).
4. Enlighten with information. Jesus provided the woman with pertinent information about who he was and what acceptance of him could mean in her life (vv. 21-24). The more you know Scripture, the better equipped you

will be to answer the questions of others (2 Timothy 2:15).

5. Enlist others in the cause. John 4 demonstrates how the Good News can spread (vv. 39-42) when communicated effectively. When you reach one person for Christ, you are creating the opportunity for that person to reach others (v. 35).

## **The Pearl of Great Price**

Our friend Ben has found this “four point” method of witnessing a helpful approach:

1. He begins by focusing on the value to God of every human being, especially the one with whom he is talking. Each of us is a “pearl of great price” (Matthew 13:46) for whom Christ was willing to give everything (his death on the cross) in order to possess it.
2. All we need to do is quit saying “No” to God. Here, there is the opportunity to deal with whatever is interfering with the person’s turning his or her life over to Christ. It may be not feeling worthy, not being ready to make a commitment, not believing God loves him or her, or thinking that the enticements of the world will bring joy. Whatever the problem, that then becomes the issue to be dealt with so that the person will stop saying “No” to God.
3. Once that obstacle is overcome, you help the person make a commitment to Christ by way of a prayer.
4. Then you help them see that the rest of their lives here on earth and through eternity have now become a matter of simply living into the “Thank you” for how much God loves us and what he has done for us.



## Being Real

Here is how our friend Jack witnesses:

“I witness to almost anyone with whom I spend any appreciable amount of time. I start with any small talk that seems to be appropriate for the occasion. I will then ask about their family. If they have, or have had, teenagers—and almost everyone has—I will then follow with, ‘I hope you’ve had an easier time than I’ve had.’ I then tell them that, after having had two ‘normal’ teens, I had a third (a girl) who went into total rebellion at age 11 and continued to almost 16. I relay some of the really painful and embarrassing details and how much it devastated her mother and me. I tell them something about how I had always been able to ‘fix’ almost any situation if I had the time and the resources. However, I could not do anything to control our daughter, and I confess how that ‘broke me’ and my wife; and that we actually got down on our knees and gave our daughter to the Lord, confessing our failure.

“At that point, almost everyone feels comfortable responding with their experiences of a problem teen (current or past).

“The rationale for this approach is to get the conversation down to a real level. You can then more easily move to a spiritual level. It’s hard to jump from sports, movies, etc. to spiritual things. My theory also includes the belief that everyone is hurting in some way; and, if I am willing to be vulnerable first, I can move the conversation to the spiritual.

“I will, after hearing them talk about their problem, go back to my daughter and let them know that, after we ‘gave her to the Lord,’ she gradually began to move in the direction of a faith of her own. She is now a very strong Christian and loves to witness.

“I also use other vulnerable areas of my life to witness, depending on the person with whom I am talking. This might include my father’s alcoholism (and his subsequent healing through a Christian small group) or that I was a successful businessmen but still knew there was something missing in my life (and how I came to realize that it was a relationship with Jesus Christ I needed).”

Although elsewhere in this book we caution against getting too emotional in our witness with a person we do not know well, Jack’s point is simply this: being real about our life can evoke from the other person the real needs in their life. Only Jesus Christ has the answers.

### **“What is your prayer need?”**

A friend of ours uses restaurant opportunities as a way to bring Jesus into the life of the person waiting on him. At the appropriate time, he says to the waiter or waitress, “I will, of course, leave you a tip for your service. But, there is something more important I can do for you. If you will tell me of a need you have, I promise to pray for you for a week that God will meet that need.” After a moment of surprise and perhaps slight embarrassment, the person is able to articulate a matter on which he would appreciate my friend’s prayers. He writes down the name of the person and the prayer need and includes it in his daily prayer time.

This, of course, is a blessing to the person in and of itself. But, often it leads to a more serious conversation with the waiter or waitress and an opportunity to witness. A variation of this approach can also be used with other people with whom we come into contact.

### **The Casual Lunch**

There is an old saying that we need to go to the Lord about the person before we go to the person about the Lord. The fact is

that we can witness best to those with whom we have established some kind of relationship.

Our friend Jack, mentioned earlier, has a way of getting to know people who move into the neighborhood or begin worshipping at the church of which he is a member. He simply invites them to lunch.

Jack's theory is that it is best to establish an intimate relationship with a person early on. If, instead, we have been "seeing the person around" for a good while without having made an attempt at friendship, it becomes somewhat awkward to then try to do it. Jack says, "By inviting the newcomer to lunch, you have a setting that is somewhat intimate and you don't have to rush to your point."

### **"Coward's" Prayer**

Our friend Frank was a very effective witness for Christ. Although technically a Christian all of his life, it was in his last twenty years that he truly gave his life to the Lord and wanted other people to know what Jesus meant to him. A mild-mannered and humble person by nature, Frank could only be a bold witness through the power of the Holy Spirit working in him.

It was a book no longer in print called *A Coward's Guide to Witnessing* that was most helpful to Frank. In it was a prayer Frank prayed each time before attempting to talk with another about Christ. Maybe this is a prayer that would be helpful to you. It is:

"Here I am, Lord, one of your children. You know how weak and timid I am and how easy it is to do nothing. But, if you will open the way to witness to your grace to this person, I will do it with your help."

## Servant's Heart

If you're not quite ready to pray the "Coward's Prayer" each day, here is an alternative. We can reach people most effectively for Christ if they see in us a sincere interest in them. At the same time, if we want to live as Christ would have us live, we will imitate him. Jesus was a servant and he calls us to serve others in his name.

How about praying each day that God will give us an opportunity to do something for someone in need? If we follow through with that prayer, we will have the blessing of serving another. We will also be opening the door toward leading that person into a relationship with Christ or, if already a Christian, toward a closer walk with God.

## OLIO

Victor Oliver uses this method of witnessing, the idea for which he got from a little book entitled *I Want to Bear Fruit*. Each of the OLIO letters refers to the key word for the four steps in this approach.

**O**pen your life fully and completely to God at the beginning of each day. Start the day by offering it and yourself to God's will. Think of the day as a gift the Lord has given you to share with others. Offer it back to him without reservations.

**L**ook for the "clues" and "moments" during the day that God wants you to use for his purposes. As we go through the day, rather than looking at the occurrences that come along as distractions, we can try to see them through God's eyes as opportunities to share the love of Christ with those with whom we come into contact. The day becomes exciting and challenging—instead of frantic and frustrating or dull and boring—when we are doing God's work.

**I**nvite people to talk and perhaps pray with you about their needs and concerns. If we are serious about doing Christ's

work in the world, we will be able to discern what's on in the minds and hearts of those with whom we come into contact. We should give them the time they need to share their lives with us. As issues surface, we should be there to help. This is perhaps the opportunity we have to witness to how God has helped us in similar situations.

Offer to pray with them in the name of Jesus. This is crucial. It makes it clear to the other person that we are not simply well-intentioned people who get satisfaction out of helping others. We are ambassadors of a King (2 Corinthians 5:20) who loves them and wants to be in relationship with them.

### **“God Bless You”**

It is always appropriate to ask the Lord to bless people. When said sincerely, “God bless you,” is appropriate to virtually every situation. The only exception I can think of is the one from the Letter of James. There (2:15, 16), James warns against telling a brother or sister who is naked and hungry to “Go in peace” rather than meeting their bodily needs. We should be conscious of and responsive to the situation we face rather than glibly saying, “God bless you.”

However, as indicated earlier in the book, it has been my experience that, when I have not otherwise been able to work a witness into an encounter with another person, closing the conversation with a “God bless you” sometimes opens it again. The words provoke a response from the person, placing the exchange on a new, higher plane. It can lead to the person realizing that you are someone who might be interested in the particular burden they are carrying or joy that has gone unmentioned. All sorts of opportunities to witness to God's love that had not been evident before now are possible.

And, even if no verbal response occurs, the person carries that blessing with them, and we can have faith that God honors it. It has brought a ray of “Sonshine” into a day in which the

person may have had doses of negativism, disappointments, and worry.

## **Witnessing to Your Children**

It is not only appropriate but a responsibility as a Christian parent to tell your children about Christ and his priority in your life; to see that they attend worship regularly; to insure that they take advantage of Sunday school and other ministries provided by your church; and to do all the usual things a parent would do to lead the child into a relationship with Christ. Here are a few additional pointers:

- Start early in telling your children about God. It is never too soon to do so; parents-to-be can even begin praying for the child in the womb that he or she will grow in the knowledge and love of God.
- Let your children see you praying and studying the Scriptures.
- Let them see you living by biblical standards.
- Let your children see you being repentant and vulnerable.
- Be your children's spiritual director, mentor and coach.
- Discipline your children but do not provoke them (Ephesians 6:1-4).

## **Electronic Communications**

There is a lot of bad news going on at any time. The news we receive through the paper, television, etc. seems focused on the bad things that are happening in the world. People need to hear stories of faith and courage to offset all of the negativity that surrounds them. Fortunately, the many means of electronic communication available to people today provide opportunities for the Christian to share with others positive and faith-filled stories and teachings.

Not all witnessing needs to be sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and asking for people to commit their lives to him. We can witness in many ways, and we can do it to Christians as well as non-Christians. Christians need encouragement as they grow in their faith just as non-Christians need to know who Jesus is and what he can do in their lives.

So, through whatever means of electronic communication you use, send stories and teachings of faith and courage to your friends and loved ones. Encourage them to share that information with others. Just as a simple smile can create an epidemic of smiles, a warm, faith-filled story can create an epidemic of good will. What you share with a few can become a blessing to multitudes.

Two cautions. Don't do this in a gimmicky way such as making it a chain letter that needs to be passed on to a certain number of others. Also, if you are using your computer to email the message, be sure you keep your computer virus-free so that you are not passing on to others something that will simply give them more problems!

## **How to Reach the Obstinate**

We all know people who seem to be obstinate to the Good News of Jesus Christ. There is a temptation to say that the obstinate simply can't be reached. However, there is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person. It is waiting to be filled with the love of God, no matter how hard the shell of resistance seems to be. Don't give up. Here are some suggestions concerning how to reach the obstinate:

- Pray for them. As appropriate, let them know you are praying for them.
- Love them. Reach out to them in as loving a way as you can as often as you can.

- Listen to them. They have a point of view. There are reasons they are the way they are. You will have more credibility with them the more you are willing to listen.
- Identify with them to the extent you can. It is highly unlikely they are wrong or sinful in everything they think or do. Wherein you can identify with them in their grief and gripes let them know that you do. This will also build up credibility.
- Challenge them to change when opportunities present themselves. Help them to see the error in their thinking, and show them a better way. Let the Holy Spirit guide you; and, as you do, keep praying.

### **Actions Speak Louder Than Words**

It's an old cliché, but it is true: what we do is more significant than what we say. As Christians, it is important to remember to insure that our actions and our words tell the same story.

Keith Miller told a classic example of this truth in his book *A Second Touch*. One morning a Christian businessman had made the decision to let Christ rule his life that day. In spite of his demanding schedule, he resolved to be a Christian in his personal contacts all day long. Jesus, rather than speaking engagements and administrative duties, would reign in his heart.

As he was hurrying to catch his train that morning, however, he heard the last "all aboard." He reached the train just in time, but as he attempted to step aboard he bumped into a small boy carrying a jigsaw puzzle. The puzzle fell to the platform and scattered in every direction.

The busy man stopped and looked down at the tears in the child's eyes. With an inward sigh, he smiled and, as the train pulled out, stooped down to help the boy pick up the puzzle. In fascination, the child watched the man pick up all the pieces and



place them back in the box. “Mister,” he asked, “are you Jesus?”

## **Gaining the Positive Response**

If we ask someone who is not a Christian, “Are you a Christian?” we can sometimes set ourselves up for a disappointing discussion. The other person may become immediately defensive, especially if they have had a bad experience with the church or with someone who, to them, represented the Christian faith. Also, if you are working in an environment in which people are discouraged from mentioning their faith preference, the question may be awkward.

Our friend Marcus, who is a college professor, gets around this problem by asking, “Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person?” Almost everyone considers himself or herself to be spiritual, and people are not normally offended by the question. This, of course, opens the door to finding out what, to that person, spirituality is. The discussion that follows gives the Christian the opportunity to talk about how God works in his life.

## **The Vocational Question**

One “icebreaker” that can produce interesting results happens when you first meet a person. So often, a question that soon follows is, “What do you do?” People are simply interested in what the other person’s vocation is. It can provide information about a person to know “what he does” and it can open the door for discussion. So, it’s a question you can expect from most of the people with whom you come into social contact.

When this happens to him, our friend Victor often replies, “I’m a follower of Jesus. Whom do you follow?” If it is said in a loving, non-confrontational way, it can open the door for a conversation that has substance, because it provides an opportunity to talk about something more important than what one’s vocation is.

## How to Reach the Intellectual

A tough character to try to witness to is the person who has a purely intellectual approach. Because our witness is normally from the heart rather than being scholarly in nature, we may have difficulty with this person. There are, however, some things to take into consideration that can make us more effective in reaching the intellectual.

The first thing to realize is that the person's attitude may just be a stall. His mind and heart are not presently open to acknowledging that our faith has any meaning to him. The intellectual issues he raises are just a defense to avoid making a commitment that will drastically change his life. If this is the case, no matter how reasoned a presentation we might make to him, he will still find objections. We just do our best to continue praying for him and waiting for something to happen in his life that will open him to our message. In the interim, it is still helpful for us to continue witnessing to him about what God is doing in our life. In that way we are sowing seeds of God's love that can produce fruit in the future.

If, on the other hand, the person is really seeking, but is truly intellectual in his approach, there are ways we can help him. One is to encourage him to read the Gospels in a modern translation and then to let us know what questions he has. If he does, and we do not have the answers to his questions, we get help from someone else so that we can provide him with the information or clarification he needs. Likewise, we recommend—or better still, get him a copy of—a resource that can speak effectively to the intellectual. C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* is a classic that is ideal for this purpose.

Most important of all, we keep being a friend to him. Let him see what Jesus is doing in our life. Keep praying for him. Be ready to help him in times of need.

## **Hypocrisy**

In considering approaches to witnessing to people, we need to deal with the issue many non-Christians legitimately have: they don't see any difference between the "average Christian of our day" and themselves. Why should they exchange their lives for something that obviously doesn't work? They know too many Christians who are not effective witnesses to Christ and who, to them, are hypocrites.

This is the age-old burden that we have to deal with in trying to reach non-Christians in the western world. As someone has said, "Christianity in America is thousands of miles long and about an inch deep." The negative witness of the churches in countries such as ours has turned off multitudes, led them to other religions or given them an excuse for amusing themselves on Sundays rather than worshiping God.

What can we say? Frankly, mainline Christianity in the United States has been on the decline for years. Many churches seem to be adapting themselves to the world around them rather than standing boldly for gospel truth. We need to be honest about this condition rather than trying to justify it or play it down. Otherwise, we too are being hypocritical.

There is only one answer for those of us who would testify to the power and grace of Christ in our lives. We are to be bold witnesses who worship in spiritually alive churches. We have to be able to take our non-Christian friend's focus away from nominal Christians worshiping in dead churches by showing him what Christianity can be. That's how important our witness is! God is moving in our day. Spiritually alive congregations are growing and people's lives are being changed. Our friend needs to know that, and we are called by God to tell him.

## **You're Never Too Old**

One of my favorite stories about witnessing is the one about the woman of ancient age who got people to bring her to church.

Statistics tell us that most people become Christians because someone invited them to church. This particular woman took that seriously. Whenever there was a special teaching event at the church, she would ask one of her neighbors to take her. She concentrated on those neighbors who were unchurched or “unhappily” churched (which, again, students of church growth say represent a substantial portion of our neighbors). Because she was elderly, somewhat infirmed, and yet a real sweetheart of a person, she could almost always find someone to accompany her to special events at the church.

I don’t have the statistics on how many people she led to Christ through this method that is sometimes called “secondary evangelism” (bringing people into the place where Christ can reach them through someone or something else), but I’m sure it was an impressive number!

## **An Accessible God**

Chandu Ray is best known as the Pakistani who had the New Testament translated into the Tibetan language and then took it across the Himalayas to the Tibetan people. But how he became a Christian is a story that can be very useful to us.

Early in his life he had tried to be a Hindu, but did not find God to be accessible through that religion. Then he tried to be a Muslim, but, to him, it was a religion of rules and legal transactions; and, again, he did not find God to be accessible. He then read the New Testament, but did not know what to make of it until an encounter with a young Christian missionary. When the missionary confided to him that he was losing his sight, Chandu Ray asked him, “Why aren’t you obedient? Jesus says that if you ask anything in his name, he will do it.” The missionary then asked Ray if he would pray with him to be healed and Chandu Ray did so. Within a day the missionary’s eyesight had been restored and Chandu Ray became a Christian.

What led Chandu Ray to Jesus was that he sought and found, only through Jesus, an accessible God. Those of us who love to tell the story tend to talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus. That is a difficult concept for some people to grasp. A more effective way might be to tell the Chandu Ray story or to simply talk in terms of an accessible God. That is really the same thing as having a personal relationship with Jesus but perhaps easier for the non-Christian (or even nominal Christian) to comprehend.

## Six

### Other Things to Consider

In addition to looking at a variety of approaches that might work for us in giving our witness, there are some other helpful hints to consider. As with the examples in the last chapter, these reflect the experience of others who have witnessed for the Lord over the years.

#### Characteristics of the Fisherman

In Matthew 4:19, Jesus told the disciples he would make them fishers of men. Peter, Andrew, James and John were actually fishermen. In considering how to be an effective witness, it is helpful to look at the characteristics of fishermen:

1. *Patience.* Fishing is not a venture that often produces immediate results. Much trial and error is usually necessary for each success achieved.
2. *Preparation.* The fisherman must have the right equipment. It need not be sophisticated equipment, but it has to be the right hook, line and bait for the particular fish to be caught.
3. *A sense of timing.* The fisherman has sensitivity and discernment for the right moment to act.
4. *Perseverance.* The fisherman must exercise wisdom in follow-through; his job isn't over just because the fish has taken the bait. And, when he fails, he tries again.

## **Who You Are**

As just mentioned, Jesus told Peter, Andrew, James and John that he would make them fishers of men. These four were fishermen by trade, so that statement would have been particularly meaningful to them.

Let's apply that principle to our own vocation and/or natural inclination. If someone is a salesperson, God can make him or her a salesperson for Christ. There are certain characteristics about selling that have a direct application to witnessing: (1) being in contact with people, (2) communicating effectively, (3) having a friendly attitude, (4) knowing how to encourage others to make a choice and a decision, etc. If you are a salesperson, become a salesperson for Christ.

If you are a teacher by vocation or inclination, become a teacher for Christ. If you are a leader, lead others to Christ.

Think about who you are by vocation or by nature. How can God use you, where you are in what you do, to bring others to Christ?

## **The Healing Witness**

Some people, including clergy, are reluctant to get involved in the healing ministry, although it is clearly Scriptural (James 5:14, 15). The excuse often is, "I wouldn't want a person to get his hopes up that he is going to be healed and then be disappointed." Jim Glennon, who devoted his life to the healing ministry, said that is a false assumption; in fact, he had never found a person who was disappointed as a result of receiving healing prayers. Not everyone is healed in the manner they would like to be, but all are blessed as a result of submitting themselves to healing prayer within a sensitive Christian community.

In the introduction to his book *How Can I Find Healing?* Glennon wrote this: "The reason for my involvement in the kind of ministry I am describing is not because of healing and the

other practical help God gives (though I am vastly appreciative of that); it is because, in a unique way, so far as my experience goes, I have found that it is a wonderful way of showing Christ to people.

“So often what the church is saying is of no interest to the general public.... But when people know that God is concerned to help them in a tangible way in their real-life situation, it is good news; and when this happens in point of fact, it is natural and wonderful way to introduce him who is the Good News.

“Let no one say that this is an unworthy approach, because it is the approach that Jesus himself made. And it is the approach that we can make today—in his name and for his sake.”

Glennon’s words challenge us to insure that we have a healing ministry in our church, and that it is more than a nominal one.

### **Welcoming, Alive Community of Faith**

Church Growth studies over the years have shown that most people become Christians because someone invited them to come to church with them. Your personal witness to what Jesus Christ has meant in your life can be the primary factor that motivates a person to come to church with you. What will that person find when he worships with you? Is yours a welcoming, alive community of faith? If not, how might God use you to make it so (otherwise, don’t you need to be looking for a church that is)? It is hard to be an effective witness from a spiritually dead church.

### **How to Be an “Attractive” Church**

The early Christians were a band of radically changed and spiritually charged messengers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the world and in their own neighborhoods. And so are we to be today.



Acts 2:22-47, in describing the newly born Christian Church, provides a set of guidelines for what the local congregation should look like. It is a good measuring tool against which to compare our own worshiping community to see how we are doing and what we need to improve. The term “attractive” church has been applied to this manner of evaluation because, if we do those things God would have us do as a congregation of the faithful, people will be attracted to our church, and it will grow.

- There was decisive preaching, centered on the person of Jesus (vv. 22-36)
- People were called to accept Christ as both Savior and Lord (v. 36).
- They were likewise called to repentance from sin (v. 38).
- They were promised empowerment by the Holy Spirit (v. 38).
- There was Scripture-based (apostolic) teaching (v. 42).
- There was fellowship (v. 42).
- It was a praying community (v. 42).
- There was a sense of awe and expectancy (v. 43).
- There was practical sharing among members of the community (vv. 44-45).
- Specifically, needs were met (v. 45).
- There was regular, devoted worship (v. 46).
- The result was that the community was warmly attractive, leading people to join them daily (v. 47).

## Ministries of the Church

Most individual Christian congregations have a ministry or ministries that makes them distinct. In considering people to whom God would send you as a witness, this can be an important factor.

If your congregation has an effective counseling ministry, for instance, perhaps it could meet the need of your friends who are having marriage difficulties or problems with their children. If a healing ministry is an important part of your congregation, that provides an opportunity for you to help a friend who needs healing of body, mind or spirit. A teaching ministry might appeal to the one who needs a better understanding of what the Christian faith is all about. A social outreach ministry might give someone who has a heart for the poor or disadvantaged an opportunity to serve in a meaningful way or to be served if they themselves are in need.

Try to see the ministries of your church as “pearls of great price” that you have to offer to a needful world.

## Will and Grace

Some people who become convinced that God wants them to witness are only willing to go halfway, and that doesn't work very well. By God's grace, they take an initial step, but they haven't sufficiently released their will to God and fall short of the mark.

An example. A friend was a reluctant witness, but yielded to the call upon his life to do something. He decided that what he would do is wear in the lapel of his coat the *ichthus* fish symbol of the early Christians. His thinking was that people would ask him what it was and that would give him the opportunity to talk about his faith in Jesus Christ. However, even though he wore the pin in obedience to the call he believed God had placed on him, no one ever asked him about it.

Then he came under a second conviction: deep down within himself, he was really hoping no one would ask about the pin. He was like those people who agree to do door-to-door witnessing and then hope no one will be home. The Lord brought him to the point of realizing that he would bless others and be blessed himself if given the opportunity to witness.

Once he had surrendered his will to God on the matter, people began to ask about the pin and he had the opportunity to witness.

### **Taking the Lord's Name in Vain**

We all encounter, from time to time, people whose vocabulary includes at least a smattering of blasphemy against God and/or Jesus. Some people do this sort of thing constantly, probably unconscious of how it sounds to others.

A friend was in a shop one day being waited on by a salesman who included a “GD” in almost every sentence. He became increasingly uncomfortable about the situation and prayed for guidance in how to handle it. This is what he was led to say to the salesman: “You certainly have a God-consciousness.” Immediately the man understood what he was saying and became vulnerable rather than defensive. “I don’t know what gets into me,” the man said. “I regularly attend church and belong to an important organization in our church. I know better than to take the Lord’s name in vain, but everyone does it around here and I’ve just fallen into the habit of it myself.”

This led, inevitably, to an opportunity for my friend to witness to the man.

### **The Importance of Listening**

If we are going to share our faith with another person, or be used by God in almost any way, we are called to hone our listening

skills. One of the primary bridges to effective communications is the art of listening. Here are some guidelines:

- A good listener places maximum value on what is going to be said by the other person. He or she listens as though the success or failure of something major is at stake.
- The good listener listens more than with the ear, and takes due account of the person who is talking and whether (for instance) that person tends to overstate or downplay the points they are making.
- Yet, the good listener accepts with an open mind what others have to say. Preliminarily judging the other person can impede effective listening.
- The desire to formulate an answer or observation to what is being said before the talker is finished is often the reason we don't listen well. Focused listening can often lead to a more measured response than if you tried to think too far ahead.
- Finally, a good listener is a patient listener.

### **How to Be Affirming**

One of the greatest gifts we can give others is to be affirming of them. If we want to have a significant place in the life of another that we may help them toward a relationship with Christ, being affirming of them is an important step on the way. Here are some things to consider:

*Encouragement.* A teacher once tried an experiment on her class. She congratulated them on the excellent work they were doing. "Of course," she said, "I expected this of you because you are all exceptional students." Actually, the only thing exceptional about them was that they had the good fortune to have her as their teacher. Nonetheless, they believed the teacher

and began to perform as exceptional students. The point is simply that a little encouragement can go a long way.

*Acceptance.* John Powell, in his book *The Secret of Staying in Love*, said: “My greatest contribution to your life will be to help you love yourself, to think better and more gently of yourself, to accept your own limitations more peacefully in the perspective of your whole person, which is uniquely valuable.”

*Genuine Love.* There are few things as personally uplifting as seeing the results of affirming another person. Mother Teresa of Calcutta was once asked by a woman in a group to which she had just spoken: “You have such a wonderful worldwide ministry, but I am just a housewife in Peoria, Illinois; how can I be an effective minister where I am?” Mother Teresa’s answer: “Just smile a lot.” It is amazing how much a genuine smile can affirm another person. If we just let God’s love flow through us to the benefit of others, great things can happen.

*Be a Blessing to Everyone.* In an age in which there is so much negativism and defeat, why not be an agent of affirmation and encouragement? It will make you feel better, and it will greatly benefit others.

## **Nobody Is a Nobody**

Every person with whom we come into contact is loved by God just as much as we are. There are some people, however, whom we may fail to “see” when they wait on us in a shop, deliver our mail, service our account at the bank or otherwise cross our path from time to time. Once we begin to see them as God does, the door to witness to them can then open.

Christian author Keith Miller tells about the time someone serving him in that manner called him by name. He was shocked to realize how many times he had seen the man without noticing him as a person or knowing his name. Glancing at the man’s nametag, Miller responded by calling his name and trying to start a conversation with him. Having ignored the man for so

long, it was hard to know where to start, but he plunged in with, “Say, Charlie, do you have a family?” That conversation led to a first name friendship. When the man’s son was later seriously injured in an accident, Miller was able to respond as a friend rather than as a “Christmas basket Christian.”

### **Watch Your Words**

In addition to realizing how many ways there are to share our faith effectively, it is important to be mindful of those things we might do or say that would be a bad witness. Here we are not talking about the obvious such as being sarcastic, a gossip, someone who uses profanity, etc. We are cautioning to be careful about the more subtle slips of speech it is easy to fall into but that might have a negative effect not only on those to whom you want to witness, but to your Christian friends as well. Examples might be:

1. Talking about astrological signs. Christians are under the sign of the cross; we shouldn’t even know what our astrological sign is.
2. Making vague references to reincarnation such as “in my next life I’m going to be...,” or “in my former life I was...”. Even when joking, others may think we take reincarnation seriously.
3. Focusing on luck instead of God’s providence and grace.
4. Making references to such things as “If he knew what was going on, my grandfather would be turning over in his grave.”
5. Saying anything that indicates you are superstition.

### **Rebutting the Bible Challenge**

One thing that can stall a witness unless dealt with effectively is when someone says, “You can’t believe the Bible; it’s so full of contradictions.” We shouldn’t let such accusations go unchal-

lenged. One excellent response is, “Would you show me some?” Most people who make such an accusation against the Bible haven’t read it carefully. They are simply parroting something they have heard others say. There are minor discrepancies in the Bible such as numbers and names of people. These can be the result of copying mistakes, have no theological significance and can be easily explained by reference to Bible commentaries.

A response to someone who claims to be a Christian but challenges the accuracy, authority and importance of Scripture is the appeal to reason. Would God have sent his son to live among us to show us what he is really like, including dying on the cross of our behalf, and then allow the Bible to be a book so full of error that it gives us a distorted picture?

### **To Risk Is to ROAR**

If we are to witness to our faith, there is always an element of risk involved. Risk implies going out on a limb. We might call it gambling on God. It requires an extra measure of faith: knowledge of, and confidence in, a God who acts.

There are four primary characteristics needed by those who will take risks for God, able to be recalled by the word ROAR:

**R**emembering that God will equip us to do anything he calls us to do.

**O**penness to what God would have us do.

**A**vailability by having God’s will as our priority.

**R**eadiness by always being as prepared as we can be for what God has for us next.

### **Being a “Commissionary”**

When the average person thinks of missionaries, the picture in their mind is Christians who have gone to some foreign country

to tell others about Christ. That is what missionaries have always been, and still are today.

Recently, one of our friends commented on the fact that my wife and I are missionaries. Although our work has almost always been within the United States, we have spent over 30 years in what could be called missionary efforts. We have taught about prayer, Bible study, evangelism, lay ministry and other subjects virtually all over the U.S. It was personally rewarding to think of ourselves as missionaries and to reflect on our missionary efforts over the years.

But, the more I reflected on the matter, the more I realized that, in a sense, all Christians are called to be missionaries...or at least “commissionaries.” When Jesus, in Matthew 28:18-20, told the disciples (and us) to “go into all the world to make disciples,” he was giving them (and us) what we call the Great Commission. As a result, all Christians have been commissioned to witness to Christ that others might be led to him.

If you are a follower of Christ, you are a missionary. Go, make disciples.

### **God’s Timing**

Especially for the person who is truly an evangelist at heart, it can be difficult to distinguish between when God is calling us to share our faith and when it is a false voice of pressure or guilt.

Ros Rinker gave an example of this problem in her book *You Can Witness with Confidence*. Many years ago, when she was a missionary in China, there was a carpenter working on a cupboard in the small apartment in which she was living. She began to get “nudgings” to talk to the carpenter about Christ. “Aren’t you going to talk to him? You’d better do something. How long are you going to wait? He’s there.” These thoughts were running around in her head and she was feeling real pressure to do something.



Then Miss Rinker thought of what Jesus had said, “My sheep know my voice and they follow me” (John 10:27). She recognized immediately that it was not the Shepherd’s voice she was hearing. With relief, she prayed. “Lord, I don’t believe it was you who spoke. You never push, and you’re never in a hurry. You know I’m ready to do everything you want me to do. Please give me the patience of a quiet heart that I may hear you when you are ready to speak.”

With this assurance, Miss Rinker returned to what she was doing. Later, in a perfectly natural way, which resulted from the carpenter asking her about a Christian poster-picture in the room, she was able to talk to him about Jesus and to teach him to pray.

### **One Caution**

Perhaps it goes without saying, but we should not use terms like “witnessing” or “giving our testimony” when doing it. These are terms that will not be effective with our non-Christian friend or neighbor. Instead, we use wording like, “Let me tell you what happened to me.”

### **Moment Closest to Christ**

One of the best ways to gather material for keeping our witness current is to be conscious of the many ways God answers our prayers and works in us and through us on a day-to-day basis. People who have been through the *Cursillo* experience typically meet weekly to discuss, among other things, their moment closest to Christ during the past week. Knowing we will have to share with others at least one thing God has done in our lives over the last seven days certainly helps us notice those instances.

There is no reason we cannot build into our Bible study group, prayer group, adult Sunday school class, or whatever, a time for each person to share their moment closest to Christ during the past week. This will keep our witness vital and relevant.

## **Parable/Story**

A parable has been called “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” Jesus, of course, used parables as a primary means of teaching. He told simple stories with which people could identify to illustrate spiritual truths much greater than the facts of the stories themselves.

We live in an age of story. People today are much more interested in hearing a meaningful story than in receiving a direct teaching. That is what makes our witnessing so attractive to others. We are telling earthly stories that have a heavenly meaning. They are our own parables of life.



## Seven

### The Seven People to Whom We Witness

If we think about the huge, diverse world around us, with people of all shapes, sizes and opinions, the idea of witnessing to the world to bring people to Christ seems overwhelming. In fact, however, there are only seven people to whom we are to witness. And, there are helpful things to consider in relation to each. Let's look at these seven people and how we might best reach them.

**Person No. 1** is the one who wants to accept Christ as Lord and Savior but has never really done so. He simply wants to know what has to be done to become a Christian.

With this person, it is important to understand exactly where he is in his interest in becoming a Christian so that you won't assume something that isn't correct. Thus, getting him to tell his story...what has led him to this point...is crucial. In other words, take time to *listen*.

Once you understand where he is, spiritually speaking, it is easy to talk with him about Christ in your life because he is interested and will be responsive. So, give him your witness, and tell him how you committed your life to Christ.

Then, lead him in prayer to accept Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. This can be a simple prayer such as, "Lord, I offer as much of myself as I can to as much of you as I understand. Amen." If, based on the circumstances you have discerned from his conversation with you, there are other elements

of prayer you want to add, let the Holy Spirit guide you in leading him in prayer.

Of course, we won't run into many people who are this ready to accept Christ, but it does happen. Years ago when I was a businessman in a small town, I was asked to chair the showing of a Billy Graham movie at the local theater. Following the film, there were people who were ready to commit their lives to Christ, and some of them came to me to help them do it.

**Person No. 2** is one who has shown an interest in you, in your life as a Christian, in the church or in Christ himself but has not reached the point of being on the verge of a commitment. Keeping in mind the background items mentioned above, here are some specific things to consider with this person:

1. If what intrigues the person is you and/or your life in Christ, you want to bring Christ into the conversation at the appropriate time. This is the ideal time to witness because you want to shift the focus away from yourself and toward Christ. If the person sees something special in you, it is because of Christ in you, and that needs to be made clear.
2. If this person's interest is in the church, you want to invite him to come to church with you. In the process of doing so, you should have the opportunity to give your witness. Again, although you want to honor his interest in the church, you want him to know that it is the Lord of the church who makes the difference.
3. If the person's interest is in knowing more about Christ, your witness is a first step. He may then want to get into theological questions he may have. By way of example, I believed in God from my youth, but I thought of Jesus only as a moral teacher and not as God. It was not until I was faced with what difference Christ makes in real life situations that I came to see who he really is. There are

other connections people need to make for Christ to become real to them. They may have one of the five big questions discussed elsewhere in this book. When faced with the theological questions, handle them as best you can, but let the person know you are not an expert but are willing to get answers to his questions or get him an appointment with someone who can answer them.

4. Regardless of which of these categories the person may fall into, it is important for you to be a good witness to him in the way you live as well as what you say. There is a saying in the 12 Step Programs that “you have to be able to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.” If we live as Christ would have us live, there are things about that life that will be attractive to others, and cause them to want to know why Jesus Christ is so important to us. We need to be sure that the way we live is a positive witness to Christ.

**Person No. 3** is our uninterested friend or relative. This person may be difficult for us to witness to because he knows us too well and has seen us at our worst. With this person we may be a “prophet without honor.” The very closeness of our relationship may make the change in our life because of Christ a threat to this person. We are *supposed* to love this person; therefore, our showing Christian love to him or her will not be the same as showing it to a total stranger. And, because we perhaps have not talked to this person about our relationship with Christ in the past, it may be difficult to do so now. As Rosalind Rinker once said, “When it comes to sharing your faith with those closest to you, it is almost better to let someone else do it!”

In fact, however, because we have a special love for, and interest in, this person, we want to be able to witness to him or her as best we can. Here are some pointers:

1. The first thing to do with regard to this person is to look at our own lifestyle to see if it is changing continually and consistently in the direction Christ would lead us.
2. We should pray for a supernatural revelation of God in the life of this person.
3. We should be prepared for a need or crisis to arise in this person's life (severe illness, financial disaster, family problems, whatever) and be sensitive to him when it occurs.
4. We should pray to be empty of self—especially self-righteousness—in our association with this person.
5. Sow seeds of God's love as there is the opportunity; pray that God's love surrounds you both when you are together.
6. Pray that God will show you the roadblock to this person's acceptance of Christ; pray for its removal and wait.
7. We should trust this person to the Lord, continuing, however, to share, witness, and show love and concern.

**Person No. 4** is our uninterested neighbor who is not a personal friend or relative. Virtually all of the points related to Person No. 3 apply here, too; however, some other opportunities exist. They are:

1. We can invite this person into our lives by reaching out to him or her in special ways: an invitation to dinner, doing something with us and our family, etc.
2. We can find what is lovable about our neighbor, focus on that and be affirming. We should continually get the "God loves you" message across in one way or another.

3. We can do something for him and let him reciprocate so that we create an atmosphere of mutual reliance and support.
4. In any neighborhood controversy we should be willing to go the extra mile with our neighbor (surrendering our rights).
5. A book or multi-media ministry is a possibility. Keep in mind the person's particular interests and share things you've read or heard regarding this person's areas of interest, including things that contain, even if subtly so, a Christian message.
6. Invite your neighbor to come to church to hear a special speaker, to visit on a particular occasion, etc.
7. Be prepared to follow up when the individual shows an interest in Christ; give your witness if you have not previously had the opportunity to do so.
8. Be willing to disciple your neighbor when he accepts Christ as his Lord and Savior. He will need nurturing and guidance as he grows in his life in Christ.

**Person No. 5** is the acquaintance with whom we come into regular contact (who is neither a friend or relative) in our work or as we go about the day; or, this may be the person God brings into contact with us on a one-time basis as we sit together at lunch, on a plane, or elsewhere.

How we proceed with Person No. 5 will undoubtedly depend on whether we have the gift of evangelism or not. If we are an evangelist by gifting, we will want to strike up a conversation with this person and will find a way to move the conversation into one about God. Then we will witness.

Not all of us are evangelists, however. *But we are all witnesses.* Here are some things to consider:



1. By showing a warm, personal interest in the person, it could lead to a conversation. The conversation could then lead to an opening to talk about God. That, in turn, could lead to our witness.
2. With such a person, we may only be able to sow the seeds of God's love. If the person perceives that we are a Christian, and our contact with him has been a positive one, we have moved that person one step closer to a relationship with Christ.
3. If we pray to be led to the prepared heart, God will direct us to those people whom his Holy Spirit has already prepared to hear our witness.
4. We may love through our eyes, our smiles, our spirits if we have prepared ourselves, through prayer, and let God's love flow through us. As we sit in a waiting room, restaurant, etc., we have a wonderful opportunity to pray for those around us, asking God to meet their special needs. It's no coincidence for the person we are praying for to look up and smile at us, or perhaps start a conversation with us that will allow us to witness to Christ in our lives.

**Person No. 6** is one who opposes what we Christians believe and who, in one way or another, will let us know it. The important thing to realize here is that there's probably more potential for leading this person to Christ than the person who is simply uninterested. Person No. 6 is aware of a life need, but is simply not accepting Christ as the answer to that need. Here are some points to remember in dealing with this person:

1. Avoid argument.
2. *Listen to him or her.* Then ask how that point of view was reached.

3. Love this person as he talks rather than concentrating on ways to refute what he is saying.
4. Expect this person to disagree with us.
5. We needn't defend God. God can take care of himself.
6. Remember that we have the Answer (Christ), but we don't have all the answers.
7. If the opportunity presents itself, we might ask, "Have you ever read the New Testament (or Gospels) in a modern translation?"
8. We shouldn't take this person's attitude personally.
9. As we have the opportunity, we should witness to our faith in Jesus Christ by our words and our actions so that this person never doubts our relationship with Christ.
10. Many of the points above relating to how we can pray for and show love to another would apply in this case as well.

It is important to note that God can give us an insight into how to deal with the particular person that might be thought to contravene the suggestions I have given. Here is an instance of that. A Christian friend who is a clergyman was playing golf with a man for the first time. The man knew my friend was a "professional" Christian, yet he constantly took the Lord's name in vain and made slurring remarks about "this God of yours who let my little boy die." There are many ways to deal with a Person No. 6 that have been outlined above, but the most important thing is to be in prayer about him, seeking the Lord's guidance in the particular situation. As my friend prayed, he was led to make a direct confrontation. "You should thank God that he has not struck you dead right now here on this golf course," he said. "God didn't let your son die; he gave you a son, and your son's death hurt him more than it did you. He has given you your life,

and you have much to be thankful for. Are you going to acknowledge God, thank him for what he has given you, and accept his love; or are you just going to go on hating?” The man broke down in tears and accepted Christ as his Savior and Lord.

**Person No. 7** is already technically a Christian. He has been baptized and perhaps attends church occasionally. The affiliation of this person is strictly nominal, however. We must deal with this person in a diplomatic manner because he may believe “I’m just as good a Christian as you are!” Yet, he is missing so much and may ultimately deny Christ altogether. Here are some things to consider as we seek what the Lord would have us do about witnessing to this person:

1. Realize that this person has probably accepted Christ with his mind but not his heart. Vivid experiences of Christ in your life may be what are missing in his. Thus, the importance of your witness.
2. As has been noted earlier in various ways, our lifestyle is a big part of our message. We need to insure that our life reveals Christ. As we center on Christ, perhaps this person will see who the Center is.
3. We can often do “homework” in preparation for contacts with this person. We can learn information about his family and his interests. As we reveal such knowledge in conversations with him, he will realize that we really care about him.
4. Be sensitive; follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Something may be troubling this person about Christ or about the church. Try to be perceptive about what it is. Emphasize the person’s importance to the fellowship of Christ.
5. Avoid being judgmental or self-righteous in this relationship. Avoid telling the person what he should do.

6. Talk in terms that he can understand rather than falling into church or spiritual jargon.
7. We should share ourselves freely with this person, giving ourselves in Christ's name. Here again is an opportunity for a book or multi-media ministry as we pass along to him things that have been especially meaningful to us.
8. Also there is the opportunity to get him more involved in the life of the church by being sure he knows of special events happening there, and inviting him to go with us. Ideally, we would like to get him into a small, perhaps neighborhood, prayer or Bible study group.

A typical Person No. 7 is the corporate executive who was faced with answering a letter from a Christian group questioning some very unchristian activities in which his company was engaged. "I am a Christian myself," he wrote, "but I never let my faith interfere with my work." Another is the person who takes the Lord's name in vain without realizing it. Too many nominal Christians never made the connection between what they theoretically believe and how that is lived out in their everyday lives. Our witness can help them make the connection.

A Christian layman, Prime Osborne, told the following story. A man completely "down and out" determined that he would commit suicide because he felt no one ever showed him any love or concern. He decided to walk to the bridge and throw himself into the river. He left one loophole: if anyone would show him the slightest amount of love or concern as he walked to the bridge, he would change his mind.

Did that man pass your way?



## **Eight**

### **What to Witness about—39 Subjects**

*Joyce Neville*

These are subjects for verbal witness. Although most witnesses will fall under one or more of these topics, subjects for witness are as endless as the ways God acts in our lives. Do not try to confine your witnesses to these subjects, but use them as a guide to catalyze your awareness of the many-faceted ways our Lord is active in your life.

1. If there ever was a time when you made a conscious commitment of your life to Christ; how did this come about? What did it mean to you at the time? Has it made a difference in your life since? In what ways?
2. If you have always been a committed Christian, what are some experiences which you feel were steps forward in your growth in faith, knowledge, and love of God?
3. If you believe that God has a plan for your life, how do you see it working out in your experience? In what ways have you discovered God's plan as you have gone along?
4. In what ways do you feel that God is helping you to grow in emotional and spiritual maturity?
5. At what times in your life has Christ been most real to you?

6. Have you ever experienced a strong awareness of God's presence? How did it happen? What did it mean to you and how did it help you?
7. What was the most vivid experience of prayer you ever had? At what times in your life was prayer most meaningful to you?
8. What personal experiences have you had which you feel indicate that you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?
9. What are some ways in which God has strengthened your faith? What were the personal experiences through which He did this?
10. Has another Christian ever shared his personal faith experiences with you in such a way that it gave you new insight or helped with a problem or made a difference in some way to you? How did it help you?
11. Have you ever shared your personal faith experiences with the same results? How did it help the other person?
12. How has God given you peace in a difficult situation or unhappy time?
13. How has Christ enabled you to make him the center of your life?
14. If you feel that Christ is the head of your household, as St. Paul taught, how does this work out in daily living with your family? What effect does it have on your marriage relationship? On your relationship with your children? On your relationship with a friend or family member with whom you live?
15. In what ways do you feel God helps you in your business relationships? In your social relationships?

16. How has God enabled you to love a person who does things of which you don't approve?
17. What was an experience in which you grew in wisdom, understanding, and trust of God?
18. Have you had an experience in which Christ's love has changed your attitude or outlook? How did this come about?
19. Have you had experiences that show you how God enters different aspects of your life, your plans, your actions? What were they?
20. Have you ever sought and received God's guidance? Did you follow that guidance? What happened?
21. Have you ever had to overcome resistance to what you felt was God's will on some matter in your life? Have you ever wanted one thing and felt God wanted another for you? How did you resolve it? What happened?
22. How has a verse of Scripture influenced your life or helped you to understand God's will in a specific situation? Are you able to relate your Bible study to your personal life? How?
23. In Galatians 5:22, St. Paul says that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. In what ways have you experienced one or more of these fruits of the Spirit?
24. Have you had an experience in which prayer was the vehicle for changing resentment to forgiveness, or restoring a broken relationship, or learning to love someone you disliked? In what way did it work out?



25. Have you had an experience in which prayer was the vehicle for healing a negative state of mind, hatred, jealousy, envy, anxiety, anger, contempt, nervousness, confusion, frustration, etc.? How did this come about?
26. Have you had an experience in which Christ has brought you from fear to trust? guilt to forgiveness? insecurity to security? bondage to freedom? hurt to healing? rejection to acceptance? futility to creativity? alienation to reconciliation? a sense of unworthiness to appreciation of self-worth? a sense of aloneness to a sense of belonging in Christian community? How did this happen?
27. What are some specific examples of ways you have experienced the power of prayer (i.e., you received what you prayed for; you received something better than you prayed for; you did not receive what you prayed for and you are thankful; you were relieved of an unhappy situation; you were not relieved of an unhappy situation, but God gave you the fortitude, strength, peace, wisdom, patience, etc. to go through it; God protected you from a tragedy, illness, setback or mistake; God did not protect you from a tragedy, illness, setback or mistake, but he redeemed it in some way)?
28. Have you ever received a healing of illness—mental, emotional, or physical—through prayer alone? How did it come about?
29. What are some ways in which God has helped you in illness healed by conventional methods?
30. Have you experienced through prayer healing of a sin or fault or habit that is not too personal to share? How?

31. If you felt grief in the suffering and/or death of a loved one, in what ways do you feel Christ helped you through this experience? Do you feel your faith made a difference in your response to the tragedy? How?
32. If you are from a liturgical church, what does the sacrament of Holy Communion mean to you in a personal way? Did you ever receive a special grace through the Eucharist? What effect did this have on your faith or in your life?
33. Again, if you are from a church that emphasizes the sacramental aspects of the faith, how has Holy Unction, Sacramental Confession, Baptism, or any other sacrament helped you in a specific way at a certain time?
34. If you belong to a small group that meets regularly for worship, study, witnessing, or prayer, what does it mean to you and how does it help you?
35. Do you practice regular private prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading? In what ways has this helped you in your spiritual growth?
36. Do you pray regularly for others? Is this a meaningful experience? In what ways?
37. Do you feel that the Lord has called you to a lay ministry? How did he do this? How has he helped you in its performance? How has he helped you in other ways in ministering to others?
38. Do you tithe part of your income to God's work in the church and the world? Have you found this to be a meaningful experience? Do you feel that your tithing is related to the meeting of your own material needs? How?

39. In what specific ways do you feel the Holy Spirit helps you to speak and act so that your daily life is a Christian witness?

## Nine

### How to Witness—21 Guidelines

*Joyce Neville*

Although any Christian can witness without training since he is relating personal experience, effective verbal witnessing is a skill to be cultivated by most of us. Some people are more gifted at this than others, but all of us can improve our effectiveness by using common-sense guidelines. I have developed these guidelines from thousands of good—and bad—witnesses I have heard over the past thirty years.

1. Be specific, not vague. Do not speak in generalities.
2. Show clearly what part God, prayer or faith took in the experience.
3. Speak in terms the listener understands—in his own language. Avoid religious clichés and jargon.
4. Be honest. Do not embellish the story, exaggerate or over-dramatize. Mention failures, doubts, inadequacies. Imply that you, as a Christian, do not feel superior, but have the same problems as anyone else, while sharing how God gives you victory over them and how he is making you a better person than you could be on your own.
5. Tell your experience in such a way that it has substance and does not come across as being primarily an emotional experience. Emotions may be expressed as appropriate, however, as emotions are part of all experience.

6. Speak matter-of-factly as if you were relating any other kind of experience. There is no need to feel timid or be aggressive just because you are speaking of spiritual things. Bring in humor where appropriate. Be relaxed.
7. Speak only to the particular point under discussion with experiences along that line. Give your biographical witness only when appropriate or if questions lead to it. Share only what the listener needs to hear. Don't answer questions he doesn't ask.
8. Say just enough to give the picture without going into great detail or sidetracking onto tangents.
9. The major part of your witness should always be on "what happened" rather than on "how bad it was." Do not relate experiences of sin, sorrow, sickness, depression, and the like in such a way that your witness becomes a tale of woe. Simply state what the problem was, its acuteness, its longevity, and how God resolved it or helped you through it.
10. Leave the listener free to accept or reject your witness as valid for him. As Rosalind Rinker says, "Everyone is as stubborn about having religion thrust down his throat as you are! The human heart wants to make its own discoveries. But sometimes it wants someone who is an expert in gentleness to help....We need freedom to believe! Freedom to live! We also need freedom to listen, to ask questions, to share, and to search."
11. Since witnessing is not preaching, teaching, or exhorting, never tell others what they should do, believe, or say. If you hear yourself saying you "should" or "you must" or other such phrases you are off the track and will usually meet with resistance.
12. Admit you don't have all the answers about God or all the answers to life. Christ *is* the Answer and *has* the answers,

but we don't have all the answers about the Answer! Your listener will respect you and what you say if you avoid giving "pat" answers and if you are not judgmental or self-righteous.

13. Never tell anyone that they should have spiritual experiences similar to yours. Each person must grow in his own way on his own spiritual path. Only God knows what his path is. He may be on *his* path even though it seems to you that he is going in the wrong direction. God can use you to open spiritual doors and plant spiritual seeds, and that is your purpose in witnessing.
14. Do not criticize other people, churches, religions, or systems of thought. Barriers are built by criticism. Instead of saying why you think others are wrong or misled, acknowledge whatever spiritual truths you can in the other belief that has been expressed and emphasize what difference your own Christian faith has made in your life. The positive approach is always more loving and convincing than the negative. Present an open mind to others.
15. Do not relate mystical experiences unless (1) you do it in a clearly understandable way, and (2) it had a profound effect for good in your life and you tell about the results. Witness to people on subjects that are on *their* spiritual level, not *yours*. The majority cannot relate to "far-out" religious experience and will turn off this approach.
16. Incompleted experiences should not be shared as witnesses (e.g., "...and so I'm praying about this and doing what God guides me to do and I know God is going to work it out in such-and-such a way"). Wait until God does work it out to share the experience. Otherwise, it usually will not be very meaningful to the listener and it may not work out in the way you expect it to.

17. A witness is not a story of what we are doing for God, but what God is doing for us. In witnessing about lay ministry, we should stress God's help in guiding us to it and in its performance, and give God the major credit for any good results; which is where the credit really belongs, anyway.
18. Do not relate another's personal witness except in instances where another's experience exactly fits the need expressed. Even then, never tell something about another person that is very personal, that would embarrass or hurt him. Personal things people share with you should always be kept confidential. It is usually best not to tell another's witness unless you have heard him give it in public.
19. A witness is not a confession of sins, so do not tell experiences of a deeply personal nature, such as specific sexual experiences, that would embarrass you or the listener. If you are open to the Holy Spirit's guidance, you will know whether you are to share something of a very personal nature with another person. If he has shared a problem with you, similar to one over which God has given you a victory or helped you in some major way, you may feel that by entering fully into his search for an answer you can help him. In such a case you may feel right about sharing something too personal to be shared otherwise. The keys here are guidance and common sense.
20. By the same token that you do not make a confession of sins when you witness, never be judgmental about another's sins that he may confess to you, which sometimes happens in a spiritual sharing context. He will feel guilty and repentant as the Holy Spirit leads him, and that is not your responsibility. But he will need confirmation of your love and your acceptance of him as a person and possibly your guidance as to what he should do to seek a healing. On the other hand, never pretend you approve of sinful or unloving behavior—this negates what you could do to

help. Sometimes he will want you to pray with him asking God's forgiveness or guidance for him. You may direct him to a clergyman or counselor. You could give him a book you think would help him. In any case, let him see that God loves him and is present to help him.

21. Avoid a lot of quoting from the Bible or other books. Many people think they must quote a lot of Scripture to witness. To the contrary, it is better not to quote Scripture in a witness, especially when you are speaking informally to one or two people, unless you can show how it has applied directly to your own life, and then only quote one or two verses. Too much Scripture quoting makes a witness impersonal and "teachy" or "preachy," and then you have defeated the very purpose of your witness, which is to relate what effect Christ has on your personal life. Quoting from a book, even the Bible, does not tell this. Your listener may know the Scriptures well, but he can find out only from your witness how it applies to your life. Although every Christian should acquire as much education in Scripture and theology as possible for his own understanding and for the ability to express concepts, some of the most moving witnesses are given by people new in the faith with little Christian education. They are able to share Christian experience because a witness is just that—experience, not concepts. (Expression of concepts, even informally, is teaching.) One can even minister to others, talk over their problems, and pray with them without education or training. But to grow in Christ, to cultivate skill in lay ministry, and to counsel in depth, Christian education in various forms is essential.

One of the best statements ever made about witnessing guidelines was that of Lee Whiston, a Congregational minister, author, and columnist for the nondenominational Christian magazine, *Faith/At/Work*. He said:



“Tell your witness in story form, with all the characteristics of drama—contrast, suspense, vividness, punchline and climax. The story carries its own witness and power—there is no need to preach, or to drive it home, or to exhort! It tells what God has done. It gives credit and glory to God. It’s personal. It’s fresh in time and spirit. It speaks to the listener’s need, not to his sins. It does not destroy faith, it builds faith. It’s in intelligible and pungent English. It’s alive and enthusiastic. It’s always in good taste. It’s brief. It includes encounter with God and with man.”

# Ten

## The Five BIG Ones

### *Questions People Universally Have About Christianity*

#### 1. Why does God allow suffering?

This is one of the most universal questions people ask. It is one of the primary reasons why many people say they have a hard time believing in a loving God. There are no easy answers to the question, but there are some things that need to be said rather than looking at the question as though it were a total mystery.

First, there has to be room for faith or we destroy the basis of our belief in God. If God did things just the way we wanted him to do them, everyone would claim to follow him, but for all the wrong reasons...primarily selfishness.

Secondly, God has to let us realize that we are not “home” on this earth. If unexpected, unhappy events did not occur, we would become complacent in “this life” rather than seeing life as it really is: a training ground for eternity with God.

Thirdly, for the world to function in a uniform way, there have to be certain laws or principles, such as gravity. If a wing falls off an airplane, it is going to crash, not because God wants it to but because he can't prevent it without working against the principles he has set in motion to run the world.

Fourthly, people sin. We have free will. As a result, we sometimes suffer because of our own misdoing, other times because of what someone has done to us. If God prevented people

from doing things to injure themselves and others, there would be no free will and people would be like robots rather than being created in the image of God.

Something very important needs to be said at this point, however. The reasoning above can be used with the person to whom you witness who raises the question. It is not very helpful when dealing with the person who is in the midst of a tragedy. As Robert L. Wise stated in his book *When There Is No Miracle*, “Yes, the suffering of the innocent is fascinating in a debating hall. It is nauseating and debilitating in the hospital room.”

Wise recalls the words of one of his college professors in response to the “why?” of suffering: “Each of us takes the best answer he can find and just lives with it. As the years pass by what can’t really be explained has a way of wearing down into one’s total life pattern. If we are blessed, we find a grace that will assure us that what couldn’t ever be really explained was in the end redemptive.”

Yes, there are reasons God allows suffering, but, in the midst of tragedy, they aren’t much comfort. The only real comfort is the presence of God who did not spare himself from pain and suffering. Often, that loving presence can only be shown by his witnesses who take that love to others in their times of need.

## **2. If Jesus claims to be the only way to the Father (John 14:6), what about other religions?**

When this question is raised, it is seldom by someone who is an adherent of another religion. It is, instead, simply another reason for not being willing to commit one’s life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. In a pluralistic world which objects to exclusivity, it is a legitimate question and one we should be able to answer.

The starting place is whether the other person believes in God. If he or she doesn’t, what difference do the various religions make?

The next matter to be resolved is how much the other person knows about the other world religions. For your information (based on figures in Nicky Gumbel's book *Searching Issues*), Christianity is the largest religion in the world with 1,700 million members (32.9% of the world's population). There are 880 million Muslims, 663 million Hindus, and 311 million Buddhists, plus many other smaller groups including Jews. Atheists represent only 4.5% of the population.

The religion of Muslims, Islam, is very rule directed, with a God of judgment. There are many obligations to be fulfilled to show allegiance to God, and serious consequences for disobedience. There is no Holy Spirit to guide the life of the believer, just the Koran, Islam's holy book. Muslims believe in *jihad* or "holy war," the struggle toward the Islamic goal of "reforming the earth," even if that means armed force if necessary. Even in its mildest interpretation, the idea of *jihad* is scary. Muslims do believe in an afterlife, following judgment.

Hindus worship a variety of gods. They believe that the universe is an enclosed sphere within which are numerous concentric heavens, hells, oceans, and continents, with India in the center. After death, the soul leaves the body and is reborn in the body of another person, animal, vegetable or mineral. The exact nature of the rebirth is based on the merits and demerits attained in the former life or lives.

Buddhism was founded in northeastern India and is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who is known as the Buddha or Enlightened One. Buddhists believe that life is suffering (and even death brings no relief because they follow the Hindu idea of reincarnation); suffering is caused by ignorance and the cravings that result from ignorance; suffering can only be relieved by overcoming ignorance; and the way to overcome ignorance is the Noble Eightfold Path which consists of right views, right intentions, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right-mindedness, and right contemplation. The reason for popularity of Buddhist exercises (primarily

among New Agers), is that they are meditative ways of coping with the hectic and disappointing aspects of life. These techniques have been incorporated into other religions.

Judaism is a religion with a wonderful history to look back on—how God especially chose the Jews, protected them, and revealed himself to them. But it also has a sad history in that, despite all God did for them, they kept falling away from him. The laws they were given to live by were not enough to cause them to continue honoring and worshiping God and being obedient to his commands. Now, there are not many Jews worldwide (about 12 million) and the majority of them are culturally Jewish rather than being serious about their faith at a personal level. They looked for a Messiah and failed to accept Jesus as the Promised One. Judaism seems to have languished ever since. They are, however, God’s special people and Christians should be able to lead many of them to Christ.

Having dealt with the alternatives other religions provide, you may still be faced with the objection to Christianity’s exclusivity (Jesus being the only way to the Father). If a person is willing to accept that there is a God and that things aren’t as they should be in the world and in our individual lives (our sin nature), it may be possible to show that Jesus is truly *inclusive* rather than exclusive. Among the serious religious leaders of the world, only Jesus claimed to be God. (And, as C. S. Lewis pointed out, we have to accept Jesus as God or as either an egomaniac or a charlatan; no one would have said the things he did and be otherwise). Thus, we cannot accept Jesus simply as a good teacher; he hasn’t left us that option. Jesus, then, is God’s answer to the gap that exists between himself and mankind. Jesus excludes no one; he came to bring reconciliation between the Father and human beings. He was willing to die on a cross to make that possible. Only he was resurrected from the dead to show us that we can live eternally with the Father.

There are some other things to be said on the subject, but they apply equally to the question we will now tackle.

### **3. What about those who have never heard of Jesus in an effective manner?**

Another pressing issue deals with how a loving God could allow someone to escape his saving love if they have never heard of Jesus in any meaningful way. This is usually another excuse a person can have for being unwilling to be receptive to Christianity.

In Nicky Gumbel's book referred to earlier, he makes four points on this issue worth noting here. (1) The Bible is a practical book, not one that deals with hypothetical questions such as this one. (2) We can be sure God will be just; a loving God could not be otherwise. (3) No one will be saved by religion; salvation only comes by God's love not because of any supposed merit of our own but through faith in him. (4) It is possible to be saved by grace, through faith, even if a person has never heard of Jesus; "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3).

Several more things need to be said, however. The first is that the Bible is God's book for God's people. The emphasis in it about the essentiality of salvation through Jesus Christ is not to assure Christians that no one else will be in heaven. It is to impel us toward doing all we can to bring the world to Christ.

Secondly, what happens to people who do not know Christ or those we looked at in the earlier question who follow another religion is not our problem, it is God's problem. We can be confident that he knows what he is doing and will do the right thing. The essential message to those of us who call ourselves Christians is to witness to those who do not know Christ to the best of our ability and leave the rest to God.

Thirdly, the reason we witness to someone who is already following God to the best of their knowledge and ability even though not through Christianity is because Jesus is clearly the surest path, not only to salvation in the afterlife but for the most

glorious way to live on the earth. Why should someone want to take a chance on an alternative to Christianity when he or she can have the best of all worlds by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives? See Romans 10:14-15.

#### **4. Doesn't science disprove much of what Christians believe?**

There is an opinion adrift in the world around us that modern science and Christianity are in conflict with one another. It is true that, in the past, the Christian Church has sometimes opposed the results of scientific study. The Roman Catholic Church put Galileo, the Seventeenth Century Italian astronomer, under house arrest because of his discovery that the planets revolve around the sun. Other instances can undoubtedly be found. However, we shouldn't hold Christianity hostage to the failings of some of its leaders over the centuries.

Some also believe that there is conflict between scientific discoveries and teachings in Scripture. Before looking at that more thoroughly, however, it is helpful to try to put things in perspective.

The foundation of the Christian faith is built on the belief in one God. This, in turn, led to an understanding of the uniformity in nature, a universe that could be systematically studied. The Christian doctrine of creation by a rational God supported the idea of an ordered and intelligible world. C. S. Lewis said, "Men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature, and they expected Law in Nature because they believed in a Legislator." But, because Christians also believe in a transcendent God who is separated from nature, there is justification for experimentation. This provided fertile ground for scientific experimentation, and the result was that many of the most significant scientists of the past (Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Faraday, Boyle, Lister, Pasteur, and Maxwell, for example) were sincere Christians.

Getting back to the issue of possible conflict between science and Scripture, one of the primary sticking points has to do with miracles. In the Bible, we have many miracles, and the implication is that such miracles will continue to happen. How can this be when, almost by definition, miracles contravene the laws of nature?

One argument against miracles is that the writers of the Bible did not understand the laws of nature, but Nicky Gumbel points out that, in Jesus' day, people knew that it was not natural for a virgin to have a baby or for someone to rise from the dead. The real issue is whether there is a supernatural world overlaying the natural one, and this gets back to the issue of whether there is a God. If the person you are talking with happens to be an atheist, he will deny the supernatural; but, if a person admits that there is a God, then he must know that there is a Creator who is not limited by what he created. As pointed out earlier, God will not normally violate the laws he has set in operation (i.e. the plane that loses its wing will crash because of the law of gravity). That does not mean he cannot intervene when it is essential to his purpose (Jesus' virgin birth and resurrection) or even in more subtle ways such as emotional, spiritual and physical healings. John Stott has said that "natural laws" describe God's activity but they don't control it.

The theory of evolution is another argument used against the account of creation in Scripture. Two points here. The first is that macroevolution is still simply a theory. Microevolution, which has to do with variations and developments within a species, is provable because we know that human beings are growing larger today than in the past, for instance. Macroevolution has to do with evolution from one species to another (ape to man, for instance) and is still simply a theory that continues to generate debate among scientists.

Even if macroevolution were to be proved true, it does not necessarily conflict with Scripture. The creation of the world described in Genesis 1 does not require the Christian to



believe that it all took place in six 24-hour periods of time. The Hebrew word “day” has many meanings in Scripture. As Gumbel points out in *Searching Issues*, “The main point of Genesis 1 is not to answer the questions of ‘How?’ and ‘When?’ (the scientific questions) but ‘Why?’ and ‘Who?’ (the theological questions). The Bible is not primarily a scientific book, but a theological one.”

One additional point. Despite the great importance of science, it does not have answers to all that faces people in life. Science cannot speak to the deepest needs of people nor the deepest longings in their hearts. Science and theology are simply two aspects of truth. The Christian can be grateful for the scientific breakthrough that will save the life of a loved one. The scientist can be grateful that life is not confined to the test tube, the calculator, the microscope, the telescope or the computer.

## **5. Is the Bible reliable?**

The best answer to a Christian who raises the question is: Would God do all he did for the Jewish people, come to earth as Jesus and die on a cross for us, and then leave a record of it all that is unreliable?

For the non-Christian who challenges the reliability of Scripture, I will quote John W. Howe from a Bible Reading Fellowship booklet entitled *Bible 101*:

Often critics and skeptics will caricature the Bible. They will say things like, “How can you trust a book that teaches slavery, or that only men are created in the image of God, and women are their property, or that the earth is flat, and all that sort of thing?” But the Bible doesn’t teach *any* of those things!

The Bible did allow in ancient days for a form of slavery that was really a kind of indentured servanthood, very unlike the horror we developed in colonial America up to the time of the Civil

War. The “slaves” of Bible times always had rights and privileges such as provision for keeping their families together and even for buying their way out of slavery. In the New Testament Christians who had “slaves” were commanded to treat them as full-equals (cf. Philemon, especially verses 15,16). It is the worst kind of intellectual dishonesty to read into the Biblical text a form of slavery that didn’t exist until nearly two millennia after it was written, and then condemn the Bible for “endorsing” it!

Yes, the Bible teaches that the husband is the “head” of the wife, but in precisely the same way that Jesus is the head of the Church. He models for us what headship is, and in a word, it is servanthood. If Jesus doesn’t “lord it over” the Church, there is no warrant for a Christian husband “lording it over” his wife. Headship is *responsibility* not *prerogative*. See Ephesians 5:21-33.

Scripture does speak of the “rising of the sun and the going down of the same” (Psalm 113:3), and the “four corners of the earth” (Revelation 20:8), but we commonly use the same terms ourselves. The weathercaster tells us when the sun will “rise” and “set” each day. Does he think the earth is flat, and the sun revolves around it? Job 26:7-9 says God “stretches out the north over the void, and hangs the earth upon nothing...He has described a circle on the face of the waters, at the boundary between light and darkness.” That doesn’t sound much like a flat earth theory to me!

The inspiration and authority of the Bible is an enormous subject, and I am only scratching the surface of it. But in the face of such widespread ignorance and skepticism about it, I want to make the small suggestion that we take another look. “Believe your beliefs, question your questions, and doubt your doubts,” as the old saying goes. Don’t let people dismiss the Bible out of hand as they so often try to do. Get them to be *specific* about their objections to the authority of the Scripture.

“Could you show me some things beyond metaphors and figures of speech that are so out of line that we have to dismiss this book as irrelevant?”

One of the most common objections is: “Surely you don’t believe God created the world in seven days?” Well, what is a “day”? Most of the time it designates a 24-hour period, measured by the earth alternatively facing, then facing away from, the sun. But if that’s how it is used in the Genesis account of creation, there’s a problem: the sun itself isn’t created until the fourth “day”!

On the other hand, the Bible says in both Old and New Testaments (Psalm 90:4, and 2 Peter 3:8) that to the Lord a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day. So a “day” can be an indefinite period of some considerable duration. Once we’re over that hurdle, take another look at the Genesis account. God begins with an inanimate world, then creates life in the sea and the lower plant forms on land, then he moves through what looks awfully like an evolutionary development within the animal kingdom, coming at last to the creation of human kind in his own image. The only difference between the Biblical account and our best secular understanding of the world we live in is that the Bible knows who is behind it all.

Of course there are a wide variety of literary genres in Scripture. I love it when people ask me, “But surely you don’t take the Bible literally, do you?” I invariably reply, “I take the literal parts literally.” In addition there is poetry, allegory, metaphor, history, parable, apocalyptic writing, predictive prophecy, and so on. A huge question that must always be addressed whenever we study the Bible is: what kind of literature is this particular passage, and how do we deal with this kind of literature? When the Scripture says “the trees clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12) I need to understand it as a poetic metaphor. When the Bible says the streets of heaven are paved with gold (Revelation 21:21) I understand it to be symbolic of a place of holiness, purity, and inestimable value. I don’t need to ask whether it is 14 or 21 carat.

When I read the story of Jonah I need to see that the point of the story is that God can have mercy even on pagan Nineveh, and a man being spared death by drowning and being swallowed by a great fish is a picture of God sparing a whole people swallowed up in sin. But notice: *these are questions of literary criticism*, i.e., “*what kind of literature is this?*”----*they are not questions of the Bible’s authority!* Much less are they questions of the miraculous; if God could raise Jesus from the dead, I have little doubt he could spare Jonah three days in the fish’s belly. The *National Geographic* has reported stories of men being swallowed by sperm whales and living to tell about it, so if it was a miracle story it wasn’t a particularly big one! But as a matter of fact, on *literary* grounds, it is doubtful that we are intended to be asking such questions at all.



## Eleven

### How to Find Out Where People Are, Spiritually Speaking

To be able to communicate the essentials of the Christian faith so that non-Christians might be led into relationship with Christ, we need to encourage them to talk about themselves and what they value. My pilgrimage into the art of opening people up about their faith, or lack thereof, resulted from my conviction that, although some 90% of Americans claim to believe in God, a much smaller percent are sincere, practicing Christians. I wanted to get non-Christians and non-practicing Christians to state, in their own words, why they are “stuck” (my word) where they are.

Having no gifts relating to interviewing people or counseling them, I knew I needed help if I was going to proceed effectively. My first step was to look for books on interviewing in the local library. That was no help because they all seemed to deal with how to be interviewed in order to get a job or a promotion.

Then, at the suggestion of several friends, I called the most popular television interviewer in our area and asked her opinion. She suggested Barbara Walters’ book *How to Talk with Practically Anybody about Practically Anything*. It proved very helpful. Many of the thoughts that follow were gleaned from the book.

It can, of course, be intimidating to interview a person about something so personal as their faith in God. There are at

least two major hurdles to overcome: lack of confidence in approaching the person at all and lack of confidence in whether *we* will properly represent Christ in doing so. The last thing we want to do is drive the person further away from Christ.

Let's deal with the spiritual question first. Jesus called us to bring the whole world to him (Matthew 28: 16-20). It is truly his Great Commission to us. Therefore, if we are trying to do this work to the best of our ability (however limited we may judge our ability to be), we are doing God's will. Secondly, God does not call us to be successful, just to be obedient. Thirdly, the person with whom we talk will be led to Jesus by the Holy Spirit, not by us; now may not be the time for that to happen with the particular person, but we can sow the seeds of God's love by way of our conversation with him or her. Finally, the old saying is right: we should go to God about the person before we go to the person about God. In other words, we need to pray and try to sense whether the timing is right for us to proceed

Concerning our own lack of confidence, there is a wonderful quote from Abigail McCarthy: "I am the way I am; I look the way I look; I am my age." Each of us was made in God's image, and we have our own characteristics. We can only work with what we have, but because it is what God has given us, it is enough. Besides, as Christians, we have the Holy Spirit within us. What more could we want? If we are feeling led to approach a person about where they are spiritually, we should never let what we consider to be our own limitations stand in the way.

Here are some guidelines~

1. Use common sense, guided by the Holy Spirit.
2. It is essential that you be a good listener; but, don't *just* listen. For there to be meaningful conversation with the person, it must be a two-way dialog.
3. Suppress the temptation to dominate the conversation, no matter how much wisdom you think you have. You can-

not achieve your objective of finding out where the other person is in his or her spiritual life unless there is a real sharing of information.

4. Before you meet with the person, learn as much as you can about his or her interests, especially common interests, so you can ease into the conversation. It is essential to gain rapport with the individual before talking deeply about matters of faith.
5. Sense, without judging, where the person is physically, emotionally and spiritually. The most effective approach is always one of empathy.
6. Until you are well into matters of faith, keep the conversation on a lighter note. This is not the time to begin by launching into the tragedies in your life or other personal matters that might simply embarrass the other person.
7. Never patronize the person. If you come across as self-righteous or with a feeling of superiority of any kind, you can do more harm than good. This may require suppressing your prejudices related to matters of age, race, sex as well as religion (some of which you may not even realize you have). We are not better than people of other races, nationality; we are not smarter than children or older people.
8. Ask a young person who his or her heroes are.
9. It can be more difficult to make a breakthrough with older people than the young. Many older people are living in a time when their bodies are wearing out, producing a variety of pains and ailments. Furthermore, many have lost their enthusiasm in the face of years of disillusionment and disappointment. Be prepared.
10. One way to get older people to talk about themselves is to ask them to share their memories. When people begin to



talk about a time when they were happier and more articulate, they become happier and more articulate.

11. Don't be put off by those who take a superior attitude when you are talking with them. They are almost always people who are insecure, have a problem with self-esteem and try to offset it by bluff.
12. Remember that the most consistently endearing human quality is warmth (the expression of God's love).
13. Your own inner confidence is a key factor in making effective contact with another. That is why your relationship with God is vital, knowledge that you are doing what he wants you to do, and prayer can best prepare you for the encounter.
14. If you still have fear, decide what is the absolute worst thing that could happen as a result of your time with this person. (And, don't include that it is that he or she will reject Christ forever and go to hell! That's not realistic, and it is not trusting God to redeem any mistakes you make). This approach will help you keep things in perspective.
15. If nothing else works, admit you are nervous. That will tend to put both of you at ease.
16. When you touch the other person's point of enthusiasm, you have gotten to the heart of what is important to him or her. Give the person some line and let them run with it.
17. Maintain eye contact throughout the conversation, and let your body language reflect real interest in what the person is saying; smile, nod, show concern when appropriate, etc.

## Twelve

### Making the Connection

The focus of this book has been on verbal witnessing more than specifically on presenting the Gospel and calling for the other person to commit or re-commit his life to Christ. However, that is, of course, the desired goal. So, because our friend Jay Fowler has developed an inspired way of taking that step, I am including it for our consideration and use.

The idea is to look at five seasons (days) that changed the world forever. (See the “Making the Connection” chart at the end of this chapter). Each was not only momentous in its own right but signifies a point that the person to whom we are witnessing may have reached but has gone no further. Our use of this concept involves determining where the person is and encouraging him toward the succeeding step.

Using the accompanying chart, this is how it works (though please note that it is adaptable to however we feel most comfortable using it):

1. Christmas. Let’s start with the assumption that the person believes in God—the overwhelming majority of people do—but has never made the Jesus connection. (Incidentally, that is just where I was until my mid-20s). The reality is that God became a human being so that we may know what God is like.

There are at least two points to consider here. Many secular people feel distant from and fearful of God. But Je-

Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). If the person to whom we are witnessing can comprehend Jesus as God come to earth, one who had great compassion for all mankind, he can get a different view of God. And, if they have a hard time understanding why God came to earth in the person of Jesus, there is a helpful story we can tell.

There was a farmer who wouldn't go to church on Sunday mornings with his wife and family. One snowy Sunday his wife begged him to go, without success. He said he believed in God but just didn't see the need to be a Christian. After the family had left for church he sat looking out the window at the birds that suddenly had nothing to eat because the snow had covered the ground. Being a caring man, and knowing that there was grain aplenty on the floor of the barn, he went out and opened its doors. The birds, however, were reluctant to go in. So, he tried every trick he could to coax them in. But because he was so much larger than the birds, they were afraid of him and just flew away from him at every attempt. Suddenly he realized: if I were a bird they could identify with me and would follow me into the barn where the grain is. And just as suddenly he realized why God became a man. He was in church with his family the following Sunday.

2. Good Friday. Now let's assume the person has reached the point of believing Jesus is God but just can't accept the fact that God could forgive him for the wrong things (or maybe one particularly heinous thing) he has done in his life. Here the person is in need of God's forgiving, freeing love.

Jesus died for the sins of this person (and for yours and mine as well!) so he doesn't have to keep carrying his guilt around with him. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for

righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Here is a story you might want to share at this point.

When our grandson Tristan was small, he just couldn’t understand why they (the authorities of Jesus’ day) would kill a King. My wife Emily answered him by explaining in some detail the Hebrew sacrificial system and how animals were killed to atone for sin and then how Jesus came along as a Jew but who was also the Son of God. He, therefore, had stepped into the system to be the once-and-for-all-time sacrifice (the Lamb of God) on behalf of all who accepted him as the Lord and Savior of their lives. At this point in the story telling, Tristan’s sister Kendall walked into the room and Tristan asked, “Kendall, do you understand why Jesus had to die?” “Because he loves us so much,” Kendall replied. “Oh,” Tristan responded, “Now I understand. It took Nana 20 minutes to try to explain it and you just did it in six words!”

Another illustration that might be helpful with specific regard to carrying our sins around with us is this: “Would you go running after the garbage truck to get your garbage back? Lay your garbage at the foot of the cross and leave it there...that’s where it belongs.”

3. Easter. Perhaps our friend accepts Jesus as God and understands that he died for our sins, but there is still no personal connection, no real relationship with the person of Jesus. This individual’s life reflects no joy because there is not a day-to-day connection with Jesus and the life of love and trust that should be there.

Here what the person needs to understand is that Christians are Easter people. We live in the resurrection of Jesus; he didn’t just die for our sins, he rose from the dead so that we can have a personal relationship with him. “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch

me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have” (Luke 24:39).

Again, perhaps an illustration would help. If you know the person, you know whom he loves—his spouse, his children. Talk about how important his relationship is with those he loves, how they deserve both a quantity and quality of time with him. Jesus wants and expects the same because we know how much he loves us (his death on the cross for our sins) and we should love him in return. We show our love for him in being willing to give time—quantity and quality—by having a relationship with him in prayer, worship and reading Scripture. This illustration gives us an opportunity to share with the other what prayer, worship and Bible study mean in our lives.

4. Pentecost. Many people—including many Christians—have never understood about the Holy Spirit, and maybe our friend is stuck at that point. They’ve known the Old Testament stories (and, thus, have a concept of God the Creator-Father) and they know about the life of Jesus, but the Third Person of the Trinity is just some vague notion that is virtually meaningless to them.

Thus, it is essential for them to realize that God gives his Spirit to those who believe in Christ; and, as a result, we can be changed. “How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13).

A point to be made is that when Jesus walked the earth, he could only be seen by a fraction of the population of the world and could only have an intimate relationship with a few. Through the Holy Spirit, however, Jesus is present in every single believer to provide strength, guidance, comfort and every gift Jesus could give us if he were visibly here. This is our opportunity to talk about how the Holy Spirit works in our life.

5. Advent. Many secular people, and many Christians as well, think that heaven is the Christian goal almost to the exclusion of everything else...recalling the old sarcastic remark that Christians are just people waiting for “pie in the sky by and by.” In fact, there *are* those who seem to look at life from a standpoint of “let’s just gut it out and suffer through this life because of the glorious future that is before us in heaven.” That’s not how God wants us to live! People who look at life in that fashion miss a lot of joy along the way. But, in fact, our friend may have “hit every bump in the road” and needs to know there is something more.

Jesus will come again, and we won’t have to suffer anymore. The Revelation, the last book in the Bible, tells us how the story ends. Jesus is there for us. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Here we may want to share how God has wiped away our own tears of grief, if that would be a useful approach. Or, we might want to focus on how life here on earth is a training ground that lasts only a very short period of time to prepare us for a glorious future with Jesus. Bill Bright was quoted earlier in this book saying, “None of us has a long time here on planet Earth. It’s kind of a staging ground. It’s our split second in eternity when we have an opportunity to invest our lives, our time, our talent and our treasure to help fulfill what our Lord came into this world to do and commissioned us to do.” What a reward God has in mind for those who live for Jesus!

Here are some additional aids to encouraging a person to take the next steps of faith:

Things to Ponder. These are questions we can ask others to find out where they are on the chart:

• Would you call yourself a(n)...

atheist

agnostic

skeptical Christian

churchgoer

committed Christian

something else \_\_\_\_\_

• Suppose someone asked you what a Christian is. What would you say?

• Suppose God became a human being. What would that tell you about God?

• Suppose that when Jesus died on the cross he was somehow dying for our sins. What might that tell you about sin?

• Suppose Jesus was raised from the dead. What might that tell you about him?

• God offers to each person who believes in his Son a special filling of his own Spirit. Why would God do that?

• If there is more to reality than this life, what advantage is there in being a follower of Christ?

### Additional Passages of Scripture That Might Be Helpful:

+ “He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation” (Colossians 1:15).

+ “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

+ “At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens” (Mark 13:26-27).

+ “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

### Praying to Receive Christ.

Here are the ABC’s of starting a relationship with Christ:

**A**dmit to God that you have sinned. “[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

**B**elieve that God loves you and forgives you by his grace through Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...and it is not from ourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

**C**onfess to other people that you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9-10). “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).



Decide to live your life with Jesus Christ as your Lord who loves you. “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:15). “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

Expect God to fill you with the Holy Spirit as you ask him to give you a love for Jesus Christ and others. “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5).

#### A Prayer to Receive Christ as Our Lord and Savior:

Have mercy upon me, most merciful Father;  
in your compassion forgive me my sins,  
known and unknown,  
things done and left undone;  
come into my life  
and so uphold me by your Spirit  
that I may live and serve you in newness of life,  
to the honor and glory of your Name;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **“Making the Connection” Chart**

<b>Season</b>	<b>Reality</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Christmas	God became a human being	So I may know what God is like	John 14:9
Good Friday	Jesus died for my sins	So I don't have to carry guilt	1 Peter 2:24
Easter	Jesus rose from the dead	So I may know him now	Luke 24:39
Pentecost	Gift of the Holy Spirit to believers	So I can be changed	Luke 11:13
Advent	Jesus will return	So one day I won't have to suffer anymore	Rev. 21:4



## Thirteen

### Some Gems for Spiritual Mining

Over the years I have found several quotes and poems especially helpful in getting across to people that faith in Jesus Christ is the most important thing in life. Sharing these “gems” with people certainly goes further than witnessing. However, as we tell our story and become involved in the lives of others, we may spot sticking points that are holding them back from fully committing their lives to Christ. When that happens, we may find that using one of these will provide us the breakthrough we need.

#### **For the Person Who Doesn't Accept Jesus as God**

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic...of else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God...or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and call him a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” *C. S. Lewis*

## **For the Person Who Is too Casual about the Relationship with Christ**

“We know, O Lord,  
That our rent, due to thee, is our soul;  
And the day of our death is the day,  
And our death-bed the place,  
Where that rent is to be paid.  
And we know too that he that hath sold his soul before  
For unjust gain,  
Or given away his soul before  
In the society of fellowship and sin,  
Or lent his soul for a time  
By lukewarmness and temporizing,  
To the dishonour of thy name,  
To the weakening of thy cause,  
To the discouraging of thy servants,  
He comes to that day, and to that place,  
His death and his death-bed,  
Without any rent in his hand,  
Without any soul to that purpose,  
To surrender it to thee.”

(From *The Day* by *John Donne*)

## **For the Person Feeling Abandoned by God**

“One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also no-

ticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life. This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. ‘Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you’d walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don’t understand why when I needed you most you would leave me.’ The Lord replied, ‘My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.’” (*Footprints*, author unknown).

### **For the Person Who Doesn’t Realize How Important We Are to God**

“Isn’t it strange  
That princes and kings,  
And clowns that caper  
In sawdust rings,  
And common people  
Like you and me  
Are builders for eternity?  
Each is given a bag of tools,  
A shapeless mass,  
A book of rules:  
And each must make—  
Ere life is flown—  
A stumbling block  
Or a stepping stone. *R. L. Sharpe*

### **For the Apathetic and Indifferent**

“When Jesus came to Golgotha they hanged him on a tree,  
They drove nails through hands and feet, and made a Calvary;  
They crowned him with a crown of thorns, red were his wounds  
and deep,

For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap.

“When Jesus came to Birmingham they simply passed him by,  
They never hurt a hair of him, they only let him die;  
For men had grown more tender, and they would not give him pain,  
They only just passed down the street, and left him in the rain.

“Still Jesus cried, ‘Forgive them, for they know not what they do,’  
And still it rained the wintry rain that drenched him through and through;  
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,  
And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary.”  
*(Indifference by G. A. Studdert-Kennedy)*

### **For the Person Who Can't Release Their Life to God**

“As children bring their broken toys  
with tears for us to mend,  
I brought my broken dreams to God  
because he is my friend.

“But then, instead of leaving him,  
in peace to work alone,  
I hung around and tried to help  
with ways that were my own.

“At last, I snatched them back and cried,  
‘How can you be so slow?’  
“‘My child,’ he said, ‘What could I do?’  
‘You never did let go.’”

*(Broken Dreams, author unknown)*

## **For the Person too Busy for God**

“I knelt to pray but not for long,  
I had too much to do.  
I had to hurry and get to work  
For bills would soon be due.

“So I knelt and said a hurried prayer,  
And jumped up off my knees.  
My Christian duty was now done  
My soul could rest at ease.

“All day long I had no time  
To spread a word of cheer.  
No time to speak of Christ to friends,  
They’d laugh at me I’d fear.

“No time, no time, too much to do,  
That was my constant cry,  
No time to give to souls in need  
But at last the time, the time to die.

“I went before the Lord,  
I came, I stood with downcast eyes,  
For in his hands God held a book;  
It was the book of life.

“God looked into his book and said,  
‘Your name I cannot find.  
I once was going to write it down...  
But never found the time.’”

(Author unknown)





# Appendix

## Study Guide

After reading the pertinent chapter in this book, answer the question or questions below related to that chapter. Write out your answers and place them in a notebook or binder that you can keep with this book for future use.

1. Are you ready to accept the challenge of Chapter 1? To what extent are you willing to try to witness more effectively to what Christ means in your life?
2. Write out, in our own words, what a witness is and what it isn't from the information in Chapter 2. Prepare your biographical witness.
3. What point or points did you find most helpful among the characteristics of witnessing in Chapter 3?
4. Which of the Bible characters looked at in Chapter 4 best fits you? How do you, or would you, model that person's approach in your witnessing?
5. Which approaches and ideas in Chapter 5 were most meaningful to you? Which one or ones will you use?
6. Which of the "other things to consider" in Chapter 6 were most helpful to you? Why?
7. Choose one of the "seven people" in Chapter 7 to whom you believe God is calling you to witness. What is your plan to do so?

8. What subjects in Chapter 8 would you find it easiest to witness about? Why?
9. Which guidelines in Chapter 9 were most helpful to you, and why?
10. After reading Chapter 10, to what extent do you feel able to answer anyone who raises those questions? What other questions might people have, and how would you answer them?
11. What have you learned from Chapter 11 about how to carry on a meaningful conversation that could open the door to your witness?
12. Do you believe you could use the approach in Chapter 12 to help a person take the next step toward connecting or re-connecting with Christ? Why or why not?
13. Which “gems” in Chapter 13 are most meaningful to you? Why? Are there others not listed in the chapter that have been helpful to you in talking with people about Christ? What are they?
14. Using the Personal Testimony Worksheet and Personal Testimony Checklist in the Appendix, write out your witness. If you have never given your witness to another, ask a friend to hear your witness and critique it for you.
15. Choose five of the questions in the Attitudes and Responses Encountered section of the Appendix and answer them as best you can.

## **Personal Testimony Worksheet**

Use this work sheet to outline your testimony. Once you have the skeleton, it will be easier to complete the body of the testimony.

1. Before I received Christ, I lived and thought this way-

2. How I received Christ-

3. Now, with Christ in my life, as I trust him, I live and think this way-



## **Personal Testimony Checklist**

1. What positive benefits were emphasized in the testimony? (Check areas)

- God's love
- God's forgiveness
- Fulfillment
- Peace of mind
- New perspective on life
- Freedom from fear
- Assurance of eternal life
- Purpose for living
- God's direct counsel from His Word
- Fellowship
- Inner strength
- Witnessing
- Sense of belonging
- Understanding of others
- Surrender to God
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Avoided or explained religious terms that would not be understood by a non-Christian?
  
3. Is testimony so simple and clear that a non-Christian would be able to receive Christ as a result of hearing it?
  
4. Is it honest, or does the testimony (since receiving Christ) sound so problem-free that it appears to be unreal?
  
5. How can testimony be improved?

## **Attitudes and Responses Encountered in Sharing Faith**

The following are ten situation exercises developed by Renee Miller as a part of her evangelism workbook *Lively Stones*. These are situations we would want to be able to handle to the best of our ability, the Holy Spirit being our guide.

1. “That’s a nice cross you’re wearing. Are you a Christian?”
2. You’re out with a non-Christian friend and he says, “You know, I used to go to church when I was young, but all they ever do is ask for money.”
3. Church comes up in a conversation and the other person says, “Well, I think what’s important is that you live what you believe. I mean, if you’re a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Jehovah’s Witness, or a Christian—what’s the difference? Just live up to what you believe.”
4. You’re visiting an inactive church member. They ask, “Are you still holding services at 8 and 10? You reply, “Yes.” They say, “Well, I would come if you’d put them at 11.”
5. “I used to go to St. Andrew’s, but I don’t get along with the pastor. I’m not coming as long as he’s there.”
6. You tell a friend you can’t go camping because you don’t want to miss church. The friend says, “I wish I could have faith like you do.”



7. A periphery person mentions, “Well, you know, I think religion is a private matter. I like to go to church, receive communion and go home.”
8. A friend says, “My life is falling apart and I don’t know what to do.”
9. Someone says to you, “You know, I tried reading the Bible once, but I couldn’t understand any of it.”
10. “I don’t need to go to church,” says your friend. “I can worship God on the golf course.”

## A Sample Witness: Where Have All My Heroes Gone?

It was Saturday morning in Chicago. Most folks were struggling with WWII...ration coupons...weekend chores. But for our gang of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders it was MOVIE DAY! It was the day our heroes came to visit. For a nickel or a Red Flyer wagon loaded with tin cans, wastepaper or milkweed pods you entered the palace of heroes. For a few brief hours, boys became men, riding side by side with their heroes on the silver screen. Our men of action were not just actors, playing parts, but on screen or off screen their names never changed. These were real heroes.

They were Tom Mix and Gene Autry and, yes, Roy Rogers too. These were strong men. Courageous men. In a fight, they used nothing but their fists. Around women or children...protective and polite. They didn't smoke, drink, cuss or hang out with gals at the local saloon. When they caught up with the guys in black hats, there was no lynching or unnecessary gunplay. More than likely there would be a "*dressing down*." A reminder, to "*those guys*," that their actions were both immoral and unjust. Yet they were all so vulnerable. Clean living...hard working...fair and honest. The kind of moral values that made a kid want to be like them when he became a man. They always saved the day.

Yet, there was something not quite right about this relationship between us "*saddle pals*," and our heroes. We all knew them but they never knew us. Oh yeah, for a nickel or a dime and a box top or two, you'd get an autographed picture of your hero. And included, at no extra cost, was a secret decoder ring.

When used with the coded messages on the boxes of cereal, *you-just-had-to-have*, you were given messages of encouragement: *Ride Tall, Be Good, Listen to Your Mom*. Stuff you heard from parents and teachers every day. Words of encouragement yes...but no real connection.

As this boy became a man, my need for cowboy heroes faded. Replaced by James Dean, Marlon Brando and the like. My childhood hero's moral values faded away. Replaced by newer ones, edgier ones. Now there were cigarettes, booze, fast cars and even faster women. I was in full rebellion and I knew it. Where were my heroes now? Gone from this earth. Their exploits forgotten; except when reminded by old movie posters and clips.

Adulthood brought me no relief. The Marines, marriage, the Air Force, kids, lots of jobs, still no relief. My anger grew along with defensiveness, reactivity, as did the unjust pain I inflicted on those closest to me. Out of control, I really needed a hero. I needed somebody to save me.

Then my Hero appeared. Not on a white horse with a six-shooter slung low for a quick draw. Not on a motorcycle, wrapped in a leather jacket, looking for trouble. But in a blue gym, on Hickory Flat Road, in Cherokee County, Georgia, he found me. He knew I was alone. He knew I was in trouble. He knew he could save me if I'd only say yes.

Amidst the sacred music and song, the Scripture and sermon, his body, his blood and his blessing...I asked him to come into my life...into my heart. And he did. He forgave my brokenness as I surrendered to his will. He placed his mark upon my heart...My Servant for Life. And that I am. He gave to me...that peace that passes all understanding. Now all is well with my soul.

And, when I asked him, "Lord...do you really love me?" He replied, "Yes I do." "How much do you love me?" I asked in

a small, frightened voice. “I love you this much.” He stretched out his arms really wide...and then he died for me. I am safe...saved and...Jesus is the best Hero anybody could ever have.

Harry C. Griffith was the founder of the Bible Reading Fellowship in the United States and, for many years, its president. He is the author of more than 20 books on a wide range of subjects: prayer, Bible study, evangelism, lay ministry and marriage. The material contained in *Loving to Tell the Story* was compiled over a period of 10 years from a wide variety of sources.